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THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL

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By LOUIS TRACY

THE WINGS OF THE MORNING
THE PILLAR OF LIGHT
THE GREAT MOGUL
THE CAPTAIN OF THE KANSAS
KARL GRIER
THE WHEEL O' FORTUNE
THE KING OF DIAMONDS
THE RED YEAR
THE MESSAGE
A SON OF THE IMMORTALS
THE STOWAWAY
CYNTHIA'S CHAUFFEUR
THE SILENT BARRIER
MIRABEL'S ISLAND
ONE WONDERFUL NIGHT
THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL

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MISS BILLIE BURKE IN THE TITLE ROLE

The "Mind the Paint" Girl

BEING · A · NOVELIZATION · OF
SIR ARTHUR PINERO'S COMEDY

BY

LOUIS TRACY

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLAY

New York
Edward J. Clode
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LYCEUM THEATRE
NEW YORK

-

TUESDAY, DEC. 3, 1912

-

100TH PERFORMANCE
OF

MISS BILLIE BURKE

IN

SIR A. W. PINERO'S COMEDY

THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL

Sung by Miss Billie Burke.

Mind The Paint.

Words by
Arthur Pinero.

Music by
Jerome D. Kern.

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CHARLES FROHMAN

Presents

MISS BILLIE BURKE

In a Comedy in Four Acts

THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL

By ARTHUR WING PINERO

Viscount Farncombe	William Raymond
Colonel the Hon. Arthur Stidulph	J. Palmer Collins
Baron Von Rettenmayer	Ernest W. Laceby
Captain Nicholas Jeyes	H. R. Herbert
Lionel Roper	Morton Selten
Sam De Castro	Thomas Reynolds
Herbert Fulkerson	Edward Douglas
Stewart Heneage	David Hawthorne
Gerald Grimwood	John Morley
Carlton Smythe	Herbert McKenzie
Douglas Glynn	Arthur Fitzgerald
Albert Falk	Kenneth Lee
Wilfred Tavish	Barnett Barker
Sigsmund Shirley	Cecil Newton
Vincent Bland	Bernard Merefield
Morris Cooling	Erskholm E. Clive
Luigi	Arthur Luzzi
Waiter	Louis H. Geist
The Hon. Mrs. Arthur Stidulph	Katherine Manning
Lily Parradell	Billie Burke
Jimmy Birch	Carroll McComas
Gabrielle Kato	Mabel Frenyear
Enid Moncrieff	Edith Campbell
Daphne Dure	Ruth Boyce
Nita Trevenna	Hazel Lealie
Flo Connify	Vera Mellish
Sybil Dermott	Jeanne Shelby
Olga Cook	Jeanne Eagels
Evangeline Ventris	Anna Rose
Mrs. Upjohn	Lydia Rachel
Gladys	Marie Fitzgerald
Maud	Louise Reed

Act I.—At Lily Parradell's House in Bloomsbury.

Act II.—The Foyer of the Pandora Theatre.

The curtain will be lowered during the second act for one minute to denote a lapse of four hours.

Act III.—At Lily Parradell's again.

Act IV.—The same place.

Stage Manager.....Herbert A. Cripps

THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL

CHAPTER I

A MAY MORNING

THE music of the band came nearer: the Coldstreams were marching from Chelsea to relieve the Grenadiers. Strollers in the park, loungers in Pall Mall and St. James's Street, seemed to quicken visibly under the lilt and rhythm of the lively air. A crowd, mostly drawn from the provinces and overseas, had gathered already on the pavement, either beneath the wall of Marlborough House or on the south of Palace Square; and even the case-hardened Cockneys who happened to be passing hurried to watch the daily pageant of guard-mounting. The oncoming band acted on them as a magnet acts upon steel filings. As it approached, each human atom became active.

Two men, neither of whom had seen the other, turned out of Pall Mall about the same moment, but on opposite sides of Marlborough Gate. The elder of the pair, unmistakably of

the type of " retired " soldier which ranges from Colonel to Field-Marshal, had just quitted a club in St. James's Street. If hair and mustache were white, his figure was trim and erect, and at the martial strains of the band his shoulders unconsciously squared themselves, and his face lost an expression of settled melancholy singularly out of keeping with spruce attire and military bearing.

The younger man, tall and strongly built, was a Captain in a line battalion, but walked with the air and swing of a cavalryman. He came from Pall Mall, and a casual glance at the sentry in front of Marlborough House, in order to learn, from the color of the cockade and the arrangement of buttons on the scarlet tunic, what regiment had been on duty during the previous twenty-four hours, cost him an opportunity of recognizing an old friend.

London gives or withholds such haphazard encounters with callous indifference. In ordinary conditions these two might not have met a second time within the year; but now the band, with blood-stirring clash of brass and cymbals, had wheeled out of the park into the wall-pent road, and alert policemen were shepherding the onlookers into compact masses. Again the band wheeled; some staccato orders made themselves heard above the din of drums and instruments; the old Guard's rifles clattered

to the "present." The new Guard became two solid lines of black and red, faced to the left, and moved in toward the square. Then the crowd broke, eager to gain a few yards' closer view of the spectacle, and this reshuffling of its units brought the two army men side by side.

"Hullo, Nicko!"

"Hullo, Colonel!"

Their hands met with the ready clasp of friendship.

"My wife told me you were in town; she saw you last night in the stalls at the Pandora, so we were expecting you to call," said the veteran.

"Yes, of course—this afternoon without fail," said Nicko Jeyes—"Nicko" to his intimates, but Captain Nicholas Jeyes of the North Devons to the wider world. "The C.O. gave me ten days' district leave, and I reached town from the Curragh yesterday, just in time to dress and eat before going to the theater."

Colonel the Hon. Arthur Stidulph, for all that he was a society man to the tips of his well-manicured fingers, had an incurable trick of allowing his face to betray his thoughts. A slight frown of bewilderment now chased away the smile which had welcomed Jeyes.

"Ten days in May!" he exclaimed. "I had a notion that you were keen on soldiering, Nicko."

"So I am, sir—nobody more so; yet even Napoleon kicked when he was sent from Paris to Auxonne, and the Curragh is a deuce of a hole after Aldershot."

Stidulph snorted disapproval.

"Put your profession first, my boy, and a jolly long first before the Pandora Theater and its frills," he said. "You'll hardly believe it, knowing me as you do, but time was when I would have jumped down my junior Captain's throat if he had asked for ten days' leave in the very height of the drill season. Sorry, Nicko," for the tired old eyes had detected a flush of embarrassment beneath the tan of his hearer's cheeks, "that's a beastly inhospitable remark, and you know I don't mean it in that sense. Just for a moment I put myself *in loco parentis*. Perhaps Satan rebuking sin would be a better simile, because your father died in harness, whereas I—well, here I am, tiptoeing among the mob to gaze at my own regiment. Dash it all, it's a fine morning. Let's talk of something else."

Jeyes had his own reasons for falling in readily with the suggested change of topic.

"Most of the men here are new to me," he said. "Who is the Grenadier subaltern with the colors?"

"Oh, that's Farncombe—a nice boy—son of the Earl of Godalming."

"Viscount Farncombe?"

"Yes."

"Lucky chap! Soldiering is made easy for him."

"So it was for me, yet I had to chuck the service soon after I got command of the battalion."

Then Jeyes could have bitten his tongue viciously, if that could have withdrawn an unhappy remark, for it was an open secret that Stidulph had been refused an "extension," sure preliminary to a "district" and a major-generalship, because he had married Dolly Ensor, a minor star of the Pandora galaxy. The Hon. Mrs. Arthur Stidulph might have averted the deadly effect of this *mésalliance* had she been sufficiently plastic to adapt herself to the ways and usages of society. But she was a good deal more of a Pandora girl after marriage than before. She regarded her rise in the social scale as justifying a loudness of manner which the stage-manager had sternly repressed on the boards of the theater, and, as the direct outcome, her husband was shelved professionally. Not that Mrs. Stidulph cared a jot. Married to the brother of an Earl, and fairly well provided with money, so long as she remained within the four walls of the law, she could not be ousted wholly from the sacred inclosures of the upper ten thousand. Fully content, she tripped joy-

ously through life, and the ex-Colonel of the Guards gained, as " Dolly Ensor's husband," a celebrity denied to his military career.

In his confusion, the younger man could find nothing to say. As for Stidulph, he was gazing hungrily at the little group of officers who had now broken up into pairs, and were strolling to and fro, while sergeants and corporals marched reliefs to the various posts in the precincts of the palaces.

The band had become an orchestra, and the conductor, after submitting a programme to the senior Captain, raised his baton. When Jeyes heard the opening bars of a selection, his face brightened.

" By Jove! Colonel," he said, " these fellows are bang up-to-date. They are playing ' The Duchess of Brixton,' and it was only produced a week ago."

The older man came back from his day-dream.

" Yes," he said, " I was there. Mrs. Stidulph is an inveterate first-nighter. Rather a pretty opera, but, while I don't pose as an expert in such things, it struck me as lacking the one song, or the outstanding bit of acting, which usually supplies the *clou* to a musical comedy."

" Oh, I thought it was capital," protested Jeyes.

His companion laughed mirthlessly.

" You would," he said. " You are young

enough to watch the twirling feet of the pretty girls rather than pay heed to such trifles as plot and melody."

"The rotten thing about the stage," commented Jeyes earnestly, "is the way genuine talent is burked. I can't say how it is with the men, but, where the girls are concerned, an actress depends far more on having a pull with the manager, or with some City magnate who is financing the show, than on real ability in her work."

"I have heard that said a great many times, Nicko, yet what little experience I have goes to prove the exact contrary. The managerial or financial 'pull' you speak of will never succeed in filling the house. Grit and genius tell on the stage exactly as they command the prizes in every other profession. Why, I could give you a list of names that would surprise you, and in every instance the woman has forced herself to the front by strenuous effort, backed up, of course, by a good voice, and good looks. Look at——"

"I s'y, guv'nor," broke in a small man with ginger hair and a bristling mustache, who had been striving vainly to catch the strains of the new opera, "if yer wouldn't mind——"

Then Colonel Stidulph laughed quite cheerfully.

"I apologize, my friend," he said. "Doing

anything, Nicko? Come to my club, and we'll have a jaw and an early lunch."

"Sorry, I have an appointment farther west."

Jeyes consulted his watch.

"I must take a cab," he added. "I had plenty of time to stroll there when I started, but I did not realize how the minutes were slipping along."

"And the years. Don't forget the years. . . . See you at tea?"

"Yes, sir. Meanwhile, my best wishes to Mrs. Stidulph."

They parted. Carrots nudged his neighbor.

"Bli-me," he gurgled, "I didn't catch his nyme the first time. An 'onorable, 'e is—Dolly Ensor's 'usbin. Fancy me chippin' the old cock like that. But 'e ain't so dead stuck on the stige, is 'e, Chawley?"

"Knows a dam sight too much abart it," said Chawley, who was by way of being a philosopher.

Jeyes was using no polite fiction when he spoke of taking a cab. He seized the first that presented itself—a hansom, as it happened, the taximeter being just at the beginning of its triumphal descent on London—and told the driver to rush him to Hyde Park Corner.

The hands of the clock over the lodge-keeper's house stood exactly at eleven as he sprang to

the pavement, and he hurried across the Row with an air of urgency fully explained by the cheerful impatience with which he was greeted by a pretty girl awaiting him near the statue of Achilles.

"Caught you tripping at last; you are late, Nicko," she cried.

"Only one minute," he protested, his somewhat heavy face brightening with joy at sight of her. "I met Colonel Stidulph, and I couldn't in decency hurry away, especially as he was lecturing me."

"What about? About me?"

"No, Lily. Thank God, he has never even heard your name!"

"But, Nicko, why so serious? And why should you offer up thanks because I am a Miss Nobody, of Nowhere, whom no one ever 'even heard of,' as you say?"

Evidently the two were bent on some more definite object than a mere stroll in the park, for they had turned in the direction of Stanhope Gate without any discussion as to the route they should follow.

The girl, tall, slim, and quietly attired, moved with an easy, supple elegance. She was young, not yet twenty, and youth is naturally graceful, but the expert eye would determine at a glance that she was a dancer, and, in all probability, an uncommonly good one. A blue serge costume,

neat gloves and boots, and a hat by no means flamboyant in style or size, showed that Miss Lily Parradell, though only a *coryphée* in the Pandora Theater, did not share the average taste of her class for bizarre garments. Despite her youth, she had graduated in the hard academy of pantomime and music-hall, and her companion's fervor with regard to her professional insignificance was hardly justified, since it was no small achievement that she should have won her way already through the most closely guarded stage-door in London.

The rounded brows over the big, earnest eyes she had raised to her escort's face showed that she was surprised, perhaps a trifle resentful of his tone, and a slight wave of color heightened and glorified her somewhat pale cheeks. Always pretty, Lily Parradell had suddenly become beautiful, and, had Captain Jeyes been more finely observant, he might have made the delightful discovery that a bright intelligence was her greatest charm. But he could only feel that he had somehow struck a false note, and he hastened to correct the blunder.

" I didn't mean that, Lily, and you are merely teasing me by pretending that you think otherwise," he said. " In fact, poor old Stidulph's remarks ran in a precisely contrary sense. I was grumbling about the difficulty a really smart girl encounters in making a start—in raising

herself above the common level, that is—but he stuck out that the stage does really offer *la carrière ouverte aux talents*. . . . How are you getting on with your French?"

"Well enough to understand that," she said gleefully. "And your friend is right, Nicko. Not that he—let me see, didn't he marry Dolly Ensor?"

"Y-yes."

"Why do you say 'y-yes' in that way?"

"Because the Honorable Arthur used to be such a smart chap in my time at Sandhurst, and now he's a back number."

"He should have done more with his life than simply marry a woman who happened to be a bit of a celebrity. Why didn't he make a career for himself?"

Happily, Jeyes had tact enough to check the imminent explanation.

"He rather lost touch with soldiering, I fancy," he said. But the girl's sharp ears had caught the pause, the careful weighing of the reply before it was uttered.

"Was it because he married an actress?" she demanded quickly.

"Good gracious, no! That's no bar to social progress nowadays."

Some mischievous thought danced in the girl's eyes, which continued to search her friend's sun-burned face inquisitively.

"Lots of our high kickers marry lords, which is a cut above an honorable, I suppose." She seemed to be musing aloud, but there was no uncertainty in the succeeding question, which was very much to the point. "Nicko, what would you say if I made a hit, and all the giddy young gadders about town began chasing me?"

"May I smoke?" said Jeyes.

"Yes—but answer me."

"I would be pleased, of course, and frantically jealous, equally of course. . . . Now let's chuck problems and admire the flowers. We cross here. The beds begin at the other side of Stanhope Gate."

"Nicko, I'm serious, as to the hit, at any rate. I have been given my chance."

"What do you mean? Has that silly little ass, Lionel Roper, been filling your head with nonsense?"

The stalwart Captain's voice had grown harsh. He knew that this charming girl was flirting with him, innocently "leading him on," and he hated himself for the miserable truckling to convention which held him back from the supreme step of asking her to be his wife.

"Please don't call Uncle Lal rude names," said Lily, though the tremendous news which she could no longer retain choked down the resentment she would certainly have expressed at

any other time; the ill-tempered reference to Roper was quite unwarranted, since he had proved a real friend to herself and her mother. "I am thoroughly in earnest. Morrie Cooling —our business manager, you know—was growling the other night about the lack of 'go' in the 'Duchess of Brixton,' and Vincent Bland, the composer—he really *is* a duck—all the girls love him—remembered that I sang a little ballad rather well one night in the Canterbury. And—what do you think?—he has written me a song —full stage, with chorus. I'm rehearsing it to-day for the first time, and I really do believe it will catch on."

The concluding words rose in a crescendo of excitement, and for once she was blind to the scowl on her companion's face. Matters had come to that pitch—he was furiously resentful of any influence that might lift Lily Parradell into prominence, lest his own dog-in-the-manger policy should be endangered, but he had the sense and good breeding to conceal his feelings for the hour.

"By Jove, I congratulate you, Lil," he managed to stammer. "Is it a decent sort of song? What's the air like?"

"Oh, it goes with a splendid swing. And it has such a jolly catch-word. I'm supposed to be the 'Mind the Paint' Girl. This is the chorus of the first verse:

"Mind the paint! Mind the paint!
(No matter whether Maple's bills are settled or they ain't)
Once you smear it, or you scratch it,
It's impossible to match it;
So take care, please, of the paint—of the paint!

Isn't it great? Can't you hear it on the barrel-organs? If only I work it up as I think I can, it will go through town like the 'flue.'"

Jeyes pulled her out of the way of a noiseless electric brougham. In her enthusiasm Lily had forgotten her surroundings. Though she was only humming a refrain, her artist's eyes were gazing at a dim and crowded house beyond the footlights. She heard the subdued strains of the orchestra; she watched the conductor's uplifted baton. This was her opportunity, and she must seize it with both hands. Now. . . .

The motor stole past with silent speed. It had crept too near, and might have knocked her down but for Jeyes's prompt help. Yet Lily Parradell was still seeing visions, and, being a vivacious young lady, she laughed at the careless chauffeur.

"Mind the paint!" she cried—and a bewhiskered face, crowned by a silk hat, was framed for an instant in the brougham's window.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed, "now I've gone and done it! That was Carlton Smythe. Whatever will he think of me?"

To her the Manager of the Pandora Theater was a tremendous deity, throned high on some peak of the Thespian Olympus. In reality, he was a shrewd and cautious judge of public taste in musical comedy, and he was thinking that if the girl would only throw as much animation into the new song on the stage as she had displayed in the park, "The Duchess of Brixton" was safe for a hundred nights at least.

"See what it is to have a steady-going chap like me handy," said Jeyes. "If I hadn't been just in the right place you would have been run over."

"Nor would I have been singing, and generally playing the giddy goat in Hyde Park. Still, I am awfully obliged to you, Nicko dear. You know you come first, all the time, no matter what the future may have in store."

She flashed a look at him, and such a wealth of tender kindliness poured from her deep blue eyes that his brain reeled. He could not guess —Lily herself could not have told him—that friendship rather than love inspired that thrilling glance. Youth, abounding vitality, the first glimpse of beckoning ambition—such was the formula of the magic elixir coursing through her veins on that bright May morning. It rendered her more than ever desirable. Given her favor, no man could resist her, and Nicholas Jeyes was a man, though neither bright nor

swift of nature. Least of all did he understand women, or he would have known that Lily Parradell was simply brimming over with high spirits and good nature. When she loved, she would die rather than offer her love.

Yet it was a moment fraught with possibilities. A breathed word, a caressing pressure of the girl's arm, and the divine spark might have reached the hidden store of passion in Lily's heart. Jeyes's gloved hands were clenched fiercely—he was on the verge of what he regarded as a social precipice—when an aristocratic dame, leading a Pekinese dog, met the two as they reached the path, and gave him a gracious nod of recognition.

" Who was that? " said Lily in an undertone.

" Lady Valletort," muttered Jeyes.

" Friend of yours? "

" Yes. A friend of my mother's, to be exact."

" She didn't forget to look me up and down. You know heaps of people like her, I suppose? Ought you to be walking with me here, Nicko? "

" Don't talk nonsense. Why shouldn't I walk with you here, or anywhere else? "

" You might have said it was an honor conferred by me, dear boy. But you didn't, and you are right. I am not in your set."

" That word ' set ' is the most detestable word in the English language."

" There are others, and we wouldn't use them

if they had no meaning. But we are not going to quarrel, Nicko, because Lady What's-her-name raised her eyebrows. . . . Here are the flowers. . . . How perfectly beautiful! Now I can see what you meant when you said last evening that we Londoners would call the gods to witness that there was nothing in the world to equal them if we saw such a display in Paris, yet we pass them by unnoticed in dear old foggy London. . . . But who christened them such awful names? . . . Ah, here is something in my line: 'Don't touch,' 'Keep off the grass.' Don't you see? It's another way of telling you to 'Mind the paint.' . . . You'll be in town next Monday? Yes? How jolly! I shall feel more at home if I see you in the stalls, grinning like a Cheshire cat, and yelling for an encore. Some girls pack the theater on the first night of a new song, just to make it go. But I shan't. I couldn't, if I wanted to ever so. There's only you and Lal Roper, and Bertie Fulkerson, if he hasn't dined too well."

"Pooh! Bertie Fulkerson, young idiot!"

Captain Nicholas Jeyes was himself again, and the North Devons' mess at the Curragh was spared a sensation. But Cupid, perhaps, stole away among the flowers, and sulked, until some other youthful pair aroused his interest or sought his sympathy.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW STAR

ALTHOUGH Jeyes was not rich, he was not poor. He had a fair private income in addition to his pay. He was well connected, the envied possessor of uncles and elderly relations highly placed in the Services, in the War Office, and in other Government departments. In a word, with that steady attention to work which our British variety of nepotism insists upon, he was certain to find the way of promotion made easy.

Nor was there any valid reason why he should not marry. With due economy, he and his wife could not only follow the beaten track of regimental life, but meander into some of its luxurious byways. They would have no difficulty about houses, furniture, a dog-cart, the maintenance of a couple of polo ponies, or the purchase of a smart frock for Mrs. Jeyes when the G.O.C.'s garden party came round.

To say the least of it, such conditions warranted a young man in spending a joyous week in London during the height of the season, and

yet Jeyes would have been far happier had fate compelled him to endure the blistering ennui of some sand-encircled cantonment in the Punjab. There he would perforce attend early morning parade, read and smoke or sleep after luncheon, curse the climate at decent intervals, whack a polo ball over an iron-bound *maidan,* play bridge or billiards at the club, and dine with twenty hard-bitten Britons like himself. Lily Parradell would have been six thousand miles away, and it was not in his nature to sigh after the impossible.

But in London her enchanting, distracting personality yielded odd half-hours of delight and filled the remainder of existence with a species of sullen despair. Not every morning, because rehearsals were exigent, but as often as she could spare the time, he met her by appointment. Weather permitting, they went to one or other of the parks—she would visit the Zoo every day if he would take her, because she loved animals, and had a way with her that conquered the doubting shyness of the creatures of the wild—or, if walking meant a trudge through mud and rain, they would drive to the National Gallery, South Kensington, the British Museum, the Wallace Collection.

Jeyes hailed a dismal sky almost with delight, merely because of the educational value of those quiet strolls through galleries and exhibitions.

He assured himself that some day he would defy convention and marry Lily Parradell, and he took a keen joy in the task of communicating to her now such scanty knowledge of the arts as he possessed. She was a willing listener, never bored or weary. She had a marvelous memory, forgot no hint of the right way to pronounce foreign and classical names, asked for reasons, and applied them correctly when tested over new ground.

With it all there was the pleasing consciousness that Lily looked up to him as a paragon of erudition. To justify her faith in him he bought booklets on Turner, on Correggio, on the Elgin Marbles, on the china of Bow and Chelsea and Meissen, and studied them privily in his bedroom at the club. Then, helped by a quick glance at a catalogue, he would hold forth as to the atmospheric depth of " Ulysses deriding Polyphemus," or the exquisite glaze and coloring of a Dresden shepherdess, *anno* 1760.

In truth, he was teaching himself some of these things, and more than once the girl's innate taste, helped by an alert brain which remembered everything, caught him tripping. Nevertheless, his manners and speech were different from Lily's, which still kept a touch of her humble beginnings, and every night, after the sweet intimacy of the homeward drive to Mrs. Upjohn's apartments—the Lily Parradell

of the Pandora Theater was Lily Upjohn in the Kennington Park Road, where she and her mother shared a bedroom and sitting-room *en suite,* which, in this instance, meant folding doors—he would leave the girl's humble abode with a shivering foreboding of the day when it would be necessary that his mother should call there.

Mrs. Jeyes, poor lady, little dreamed of the impending cataclysm.

Daughter of a baronet, and widow of a distinguished General, she was a good and charitable woman, beloved by all who knew her, but intensely proud of her birth and breeding. What would she say when she heard of one of her sons marrying a Pandora girl? And what would she think when she met Mrs. Upjohn, a typical Cockney, without an " h " in her vocabulary, save in instances where it was superfluous? Indeed, would the two ever meet? Would not the shocked and anguished gentlewoman emphatically refuse to stain her skirts with the dust of Kennington Park Road?

It was no light problem that tortured the big, red-faced, well-groomed Captain of the North Devons, and there is little wonder that he shirked its solution. So he drifted helplessly through those scattered hours of happiness, and those long-drawn watches of the day and night, when care sat heavily on his shoulders, and thus

lent himself to the greater folly of letting " I dare not " wait upon " I would."

At last came the Monday when Lily Parradell would be made or marred in her profession. It was a big thing for a girl still in her teens to be given a star turn in the leading theater of London devoted to musical comedy. If she succeeded, she would leap at a bound to the front rank; if, by some mischance, her song did not catch the public fancy, or if nervousness or excitement robbed her for the moment of her witchery of voice and manner, years might pass before another such splendid opportunity presented itself. In the one event, the number would simply be dropped, because Carlton Smythe was noted for a Napoleonic quickness of decision; in the other, were there not a score of girls in the chorus capable of singing it well, and feverishly eager to prove their fitness?

Jeyes had seen little of Lily during the past three days. Every spare minute on Friday and Saturday had been devoted to rehearsal; as for Sunday, Vincent Bland, the composer, to whose initiative her selection for the new part was wholly due, insisted that she should remain in bed all day.

Lily, of course, rebelled, but Bland belied his name by firm threats of the direst consequences if she disobeyed his orders. On the Monday, however, Jeyes broke the custom which per-

mitted Lily to reach the theater unaccompanied, and convoyed her thither in a cab.

As they crossed Waterloo Bridge, and the magnificent panorama of London, from St. Paul's to the Houses of Parliament, spread its glories before their eyes, the girl turned impulsively to the man she regarded, in a curiously impersonal way, as her lover.

"Nicko," she said, "are you bringing anyone to the theater to-night?"

"Bringing anyone?" he repeated.

"Yes. Have you taken only one stall?"

"I'm not exactly what you might call tiny, but I couldn't slop over into two," he replied, veiling a vague uneasiness with clumsy humor.

"But you have a brother—and a mother," she persisted. "Why haven't you invited one or both to come with you? I know you would find it difficult to introduce me to your people—oh, let me say what I want to say—surely you and I can speak the truth to each other sometimes—but—to-night—you might have told them—that I was a friend—that you were interested in my success."

He was so dumfounded that he blurted out a more convincing answer than he could have contrived by using his wits.

"Honestly, Lil, I never thought of it," he vowed. "My mind has been running on you these last few days to the exclusion of every-

thing else. It would have been quite an undertaking, too. My mother lives in Huntingdon, and Bob is up to his eyes in business. He and some other fellows are taking on a big tract of land in Rhodesia, and they have heaps to do before they sail."

For a little while there was silence. No heavy vehicles were near, and the jingle of bells on a group of hansoms all scampering toward the Strand seemed to chime with the golden reverie of a summer evening.

" I suppose your ma doesn't even know you are in town? " said Lily suddenly.

Jeyes loathed that word " ma," and hoped he had cured her of using it. If he had been better versed in the wayward heart of woman he would have understood that the lapse was intentional, a verbal thrust at all snobbishness and class prejudice.

" No," he said gruffly. " I did not tell my mother I had obtained short leave, because she would have expected me to give her at least one night at home, and I wanted every possible minute for you. Sons are mean in that way, but, at any rate, I try not to hurt her feelings."

The girl's eyes were shining like sapphires. Seeing nothing, they were gazing fixedly at some early diners in the Savoy restaurant. But her emotions bubbled forth without restraint.

" Dear Nicko! . . . Is he grumpy, then?

. . . And isn't Lily Parradell a horrid little wretch? . . . It's nerves, Nicko, just nerves! I'm sitting here at your side, demure as a church mouse, to all appearance, but I'm really singing and dancing, flinging myself madly around the stage, *à la* Lottie Collins, in 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay.' . . . Yes, I know it's stupid, and may be positively harmful, but I can't help it. It's in my blood. Even you men get it occasionally, don't you?—when you gamble away a year's income on a game of cards, or join in a rush for some new goldfield. And *I* am gambling to-night. This is *my* toss of the dice. It's make or break with me at 9:15."

Now, there were a hundred ways in which a half hysterical girl might be soothed by the man who loved her, but Captain Nicholas Jeyes did not adopt any of them.

"You're frightened—that's what's the matter with you," he laughed. "Only a case of blue funk. Every fellow gets it the first time he goes into action, but it vanishes when the bullets begin to sail past harmlessly."

"But, if having the stage to yourself means going into action, I got over that difficulty before I was fourteen," she said.

Then she turned and looked at him, marking his stolid aspect.

"You're a bit of a humbug yourself, Nicko," she tittered. "You have taught me heaps

about pictures and statues, and old furniture, but you really haven't got a glimmer of art in your soul. You're just a stiff, matter-of-fact soldier-man, and that's the best and the worst I can say of you."

He was stirred to defend himself.

"You might add that I am also your very loyal friend and well-wisher," he declared.

Perhaps the girl was vouchsafed some glimpse of the mortal struggle raging within, which, in its way, gave a pathetic force to his colorless words, for she placed a hand impulsively on his arm.

"I am more certain of that, Nicko, than of carrying the house with me to-night," she said, and there was a tender note in her voice which made divinest music in his ears. "But here we are at the theater. You'll wait for me, of course? A smart hansom, if I knock 'em; otherwise, a four-wheeler with a broken-winded gee-gee."

"Good-by, and good luck!"

She smiled dazzlingly from the stage-door, and was gone. He drove to his club, changed his clothes, ate a hasty meal, and was in his stall at the Pandora before the curtain rose.

He was familiar with all the songs and most of the lines of "The Duchess of Brixton," and soon discovered that author and composer had given Lily every reasonable chance of finding

her feet before her own special item was reached. She had been promoted from the chorus to a definite character, and had something to say now and then. It was noticeable that her speaking voice filled the theater, and Jeyes, slight as was his knowledge of stagecraft, grasped the essential fact that the hard-won experience of the music-hall was enabling her to make her personality felt without effort.

A printed slip attached to the programme announced that during the first act Miss Lily Parradell would sing a new song entitled "Mind the paint," and the presence of a number of critics showed that the management was booming the change. As it happened, Jeyes had not inquired as to the particular incident in the story which led up to Lily's effort, and the introductory symphony was so brief that he was almost surprised when she bounded forward from the back of the stage and began to sing.

She had not uttered a complete line before he knew that she was easily first in a cast which included some of the most notable musical comedy actresses in London. Her fresh, pure voice had in it a joyous lilt which appealed to the audience from the opening note, and her light-hearted audacity gave point and significance to some commonplace lyrics. When she danced to the music of the chorus—that same

rhythmic refrain which she had hummed in Hyde Park—it was as though some woodland nymph were rapturously displaying her delight in life, the ecstasy of youth, the half-shy yet all-conquering sense of maiden sovereignty.

Instantly the house was on the *qui vive* for the rising of a new star in the theatrical firmament. The hush of expectation was succeeded by a low murmur of gratified discovery. A subtle sense of unanimity in approval spread throughout the crowded audience, and the thunderous applause that broke forth at the conclusion of the last verse was stilled while the lithe, graceful form was dancing, only to crash out in long-sustained volume as Lily bowed herself breathlessly to the wings, darting one last vivid look at the place where she knew Jeyes was seated.

The tumult could not be quieted until the conductor's baton tapped sharply on the music-stand, and the orchestra played the symphony once more. Lily reappeared, smiling and self-possessed. She sang an encore without any sign of exhaustion, and, when the chorus was reached, the gallery joined in:

"Mind the paint! Mind the paint!
A girl is not a sinner just because she's not a saint!
But my heart shall hold you dearer;
You may come a little nearer
If you'll *only* mind the paint—mind the paint!"

The glance with which Lily rewarded her unknown friends among "the gods" was one of the many unrehearsed triumphs of the evening. When she danced again she had the intoxicating ichor of success in her veins. This time there was no restraint, no sub-conscious memory of stage directions and the studious posturings of a ballet-master. She threw her very soul into motion; her dancing was the physical expression of an ecstatic spirit.

And the house wanted more. Londoners, despite the opinion of their American cousins, are quick as any people in the world to recognize real talent, especially in the theater, and this acutely critical audience realized that they were privileged to witness an event which would be the talk of the town next day. But Lily neither sang nor danced again that evening. Carlton Smythe, hidden in the corner of a box, had signaled a decisive negative to the stage-manager. For one thing, he did not wish to subject a valuable recruit to undue strain; for another, he was fully content with the sensational effect already secured.

So the girl courtesied and laughed delightedly and wafted kisses from her finger-tips to the gallery, and, when the orchestra increased the tension by replaying the chorus, the recipients of those kisses testified their appreciation thereof by howling lustily:

"Mind the paint! Mind the paint!
A girl is not a sinner just because she's not a saint!"

Such moments are rare, even in the lives of the gifted—they are precious, even to genius. On the stage they are proclaimed aloud with trumpets; in the studio, in the laboratory, at the littered table of the writer, they come in silence. But the artist and thinker quiver under their mighty influence, whether the glad pæan is chanted by the voice of the multitude, or whispered in the soul's ear by some unseen and awful presence. As achievements rank, it was perhaps a trivial thing that a pretty girl should have shaken the Pandora Theater from floor to ceiling by a pleasing performance of a song and dance, but Lily Parradell had climbed just a step beyond the high level of artistry imposed by the London stage. Grace, harmony, charm of voice and movement—these were the essentials of her craft: she had superadded a haunting memory of beauty, a sense of unfettered and elusive youth, a new and fascinating variant of the eternal puzzle of femininity.

So the patrons of the Pandora simmered with glee because she had tickled their jaded appetites so unexpectedly, and grinned with merriment when the principal comedian gagged them back to the right humor by tripping the impressionable Duke of Brixton, whose instant and

callow ardor inspired him to pursuit of the vanished attraction.

"No, you don't, Strawberry," he cackled. "This great metropolis wants that fairy yet awhile. So keep orf of it! Mind the paint!"

Captain Nicholas Jeyes, after being carried away like the rest by general enthusiasm, recovered his wits in becoming aware of a certain blankness behind the footlights when Lily Parradell had disappeared, a quite natural feeling which was usurped by a highly disagreeable one. Within a space of five minutes, or less, the girl he loved had reached the topmost rung of the ladder in her profession. With average good fortune and good health, she was now fairly established as a popular idol. Newspaper paragraphs, interviews, portraits, picture postcards, the clatter of clubs and society, aided and abetted by the solid claims of self-interest which must sway the proprietor of the Pandora Theater, would put her on a pinnacle from which she need not be dislodged for many a year. King Demos had spoken, and with no uncertain judgment. It was as though he, Nicko Jeyes, standing in front of his company on parade, had been suddenly promoted by his sovereign to command the Aldershot Division.

Such a miracle could never happen to him, but its equivalent had happened to Lily Parradell. In very truth he had obeyed Emerson's behest

by hitching his wagon to a star, and the notion had a soul-sickening addendum in the knowledge that he was a very plodding wagon to be attached to such a particularly bright and dazzling star.

Hardly realizing what he was about, he rose from his seat, trod on several people's toes while making blindly for the stairs, and earned a good deal of angry comment by interfering with one of the leading comedian's most excruciating jokes.

Angry, pleased, excited, dejected—at once gratified by the fact that none of these feather-brained fools in the audience could rob him of his intimacy with the girl they had so recently learnt to admire, and aflame with jealous dread lest this night's ovation might prove the beginning of the end of his romance—he reached the foyer and gulped down a whisky-and-soda.

A hand fell heavily on his shoulder, and a guttural voice said:

"Ach, Gott! Niggo, you swallow dat ligue a stein of Pilzener."

He turned. A tall, fair-haired, faultlessly-dressed German was at his elbow.

"Hullo, baron," he said. "You here? But, of course, you would be. You're one of the recognized Pandora boys."

"Zum-one dold me you haf pin here mosd

nides lasd weeg, Niggo. Bud whad do you dink of de new danzer? Isn'd she de limid? "

Jeyes bestirred himself. It was imperative that Von Rettenmayer, a highly popular attaché at the German Embassy, and an inveterate gad-about in society, should not have cause to quiz him.

" You mean Miss Parradell? " he said. " She is more than a new dancer. Why, man alive, she has proved herself the leading actress of them all."

" She is goot—yez, suberb, bud dere are ozzers who don'd get a jance. Dere's Enid Mongrieff, for inzdanz. Now, if Carldon Smyd——" The voluble baron checked himself sharply. His good-humored face crinkled in a welcoming smile. " Hullo, Carldon," he cried, " I hobe you're bleazed. Congradulazhuns! Mizz Barradell iss a beach."

" My dear baron," said a stout little man who had approached the bar in company with Carlton Smythe, " you really shouldn't mix Americanisms with your English. I suppose you mean to imply that Miss Parradell resembles a certain luscious fruit, whereas you tell us she is a tree."

" I said a beach, nod a peach," protested Von Rettenmayer.

" Yes, that's just the trouble. Why don't you carry a supply of jujubes? "

" You're a bid of a cough-drob yourselv, Lal," snickered the baron, whose acquaintance with English slang was profound, though his pronunciation might be faulty.

The manager nodded to Jeyes, whom he knew slightly.

" A bottle of '96, and half a dozen glasses," he said to the girl behind the bar. " We're just going to drink Miss Parradell's health," he added, addressing the group collectively. " Mind you, this is not for publication, but that song of hers was the one thing wanted."

" Souvenirs—five hundredth performance of ' The Duchess of Brixton '—souvenirs, a shilling each—photographs of Miss Lily Parradell, an' words an' music of ' Mind the Paint '—complete in souvenir, one shilling," chanted Lionel Roper, whose bald head was glistening after the excitement of seeing his pretty protégée safely launched in the smooth waters of success.

" Five hundred? Well, I hope so," said Smythe, watching the champagne creaming in the glasses.

" You're a pessimist, Carlton; an incurable pessimist," spluttered the stout stockbroker. " You know as well as I do that you've found the real thing in Lily Parradell."

" Quite true, my boy—quite true, if only she wasn't so confoundedly attractive."

"Con——!"

Roper's white eyebrows rose to his bare scalp in speechless astonishment.

"Yes, I mean what I say. Every titled young ass in town——"

Suddenly the astute Smythe remembered that Jeyes was a privileged friend of the new star.

"Ah, well," he said, "here's to her, anyhow!"

The glasses were lifted, but Jeyes swallowed with the good wine a potion bitter as gall.

CHAPTER III

VERTIGO

WHISKY-AND-SODA and champagne, in layers, are remarkable for their stimulating effect. Jeyes shook off his gloom; he even talked cordially with Bertie Fulkerson—a pallid, languid youngster, whose red-rimmed eyes and generally decrepit appearance suggested that he drank and smoked too much, and walked and ate too little.

A plump, jovial-looking, middle-aged man, of marked Jewish appearance, had lounged in with Fulkerson, and was hailed instantly by Roper as "Sam." To the public at large he was known as Mr. Samuel de Castro, a dabbler in literature and the arts; but, seeing that his output in these slave-driven occupations was nil, and that he always had plenty of money, which he spent freely as a patron of the lighter drama, it might be assumed that certain whisperings that connected him with a noted firm of rag-merchants were not wholly devoid of foundation. He spoke with a pronounced lisp, wore white waistcoats morning and evening, sported a gorgeous diamond, interchangeable as

a scarf-pin and stud, and was popularly reputed to regret the fact that the white spats he affected during the day were not fashionable at night.

He, it would seem, had heard of Lily Parradell for the first time that evening.

"Glad to thee you, Lal," he said to the stockbroker. "Bertie tellth me you know the fair Lily. Won't you introduthe me? I suppoth all her friendth will be meetin' her after the thow."

"You must ask Bland, dear boy. Vincent has kept us bally outsiders in the dark. You, too, Carlton—*you* were just as bad. A regular conspiracy I call it."

"But Mith Parradell ought to hear what we think about her. Letth's get up a thupper. Come, now, Carlton, be a sport. You can manage it. Jutht give the word, an' I'll order a table at Catani'th."

"No go, Sam, me boy," said Smythe cheerily—he was celebrated as the most genial refuser in the business. "Vincent Bland is a regular martinet in these matters—kept the poor girl in bed all Sunday, I hear—actually set her mother to mount guard over her with an ax, or some other domestic implement. And he's right, me boy, quite right. He's too old a bird to allow his prize chick to crock with excitement."

Jeyes decided to assert himself. He was flushed in face and husky of voice, and his gorge rose at hearing these men discuss his Lily without any regard for his presence, as though he were a nonentity.

"Mr. Bland would certainly refuse to permit Miss Parradell to attend a supper-party to-night," he said, and his strident tone held every ear at once; "but, if it is equally agreeable to all of you, why not lunch with me at Catani's to-morrow?—say, one o'clock, sharp—and I'll bring Miss Parradell."

No one answered for a second or two, until Roper recovered his wits.

"Right you are, Jeyes," he cried. "You took the words out of my mouth, but youth will be served—eh, what? *My* little festivity can stand over till *you're* playin' marbles on the Curragh."

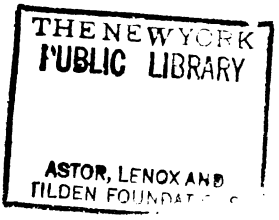
Jeyes glanced round.

"How many of us? Six? Miss Parradell will invite a few friends from the theater—call it a round dozen. May I send her a note, Mr. Smythe? And would you let me use your telephone? I usually take her home in a hansom, but to-night's blaze of glory calls for a brougham."

The manager cast a contemplative eye over him.

"Certainly," he said. "Come along.

LILY GIVES HER FRIEND, VINCENT BLAND, A PERSONAL CHECK TO MAKE UP HIS LOSSES AT THE RACES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You'll find all the resources of civilization in my room."

"Who'th the lordly perthon?" demanded De Castro, when the two had gone.

"Name of Jeyes—Nicko Jeyes—in the North Devons," explained Roper briefly. Notwithstanding his prompt acceptance of the morrow's invitation, he was annoyed by the young man's air of proprietorship where Lily Parradell was concerned, and was rather inclined to resent it.

"Ith he the acthepted candidate?" purred De Castro, who liked nothing better than a chance of stroking his friend's fur the wrong way.

"Not he. He'd like to be, that's all."

"He's a bid of a wed blanked, iss poor Niggo," grinned Von Rettenmayer. "Led de priddy Lily wanz get her het vree, and it' all ub wid Niggo."

"For the Lord's sake, baron, have another glass of bubbly, and clear your throat," growled Roper irritably.

"No wine left. Four whiskies-an'-sodas, please, miss," said Fulkerson.

"He-he!" giggled De Castro, "you do come to the point quickly, Bertie."

"Jawin' is dry work," drawled Fulkerson, "and some people I could name seem to have lost their tempers. Why was Nicko in such a

rat? He looked as if he wanted to lick somebody."

Meanwhile, Smythe led Jeyes along a corridor, and turned the handle of a door cunningly concealed in a mass of white-and-gold molding.

" Here you are," he said, switching on the electric lights, " write at my desk. While you're about it, shall I ring up the *coupé* people? "

" It's awfully good of you," said Jeyes.

Smythe busied himself at the telephone, but his gaze dwelt on the face of the man seated at the table. In stature he was fully as tall as Jeyes, though he lacked the physical development of drill and an open-air life. His hair might have been grey had it been permitted to follow its natural bent, but his neatly-trimmed Vandyke beard was still silky in texture and light brown in color; the instincts of the older crop were checked, though not so obtrusively as to attract attention. For the rest he was a good-looking person, with a nose inclining to length and thinness, and long practice had given him the most amiable and non-committal smile in London.

By the time the brougham was arranged for —11.15, to ask for Captain Jeyes, at the stage-door of the Pandora Theater—the note was finished.

"I am very much obliged——" began Jeyes, standing up.

"I'll send that round in a few minutes. Miss Parradell is off soon after the curtain rises," said Smythe pleasantly. "By the way, you must be an old friend of hers?"

"Yes—oh yes—as age goes in friendship with a girl under twenty."

"Is she so young? Well, she looks it. She has a career before her, Captain Jeyes. I hope you don't mind me saying it, but it would be a pity if anything interfered with her prospects in the near future. Marriage, for instance, would be a real calamity, not only to the play-going public, but to herself."

If Carlton Smythe had taken part in his own productions he could never have avoided being cast for a kind, good husband or a genial uncle. His smooth voice and sympathetic smile took away any semblance of sting, or even of undue inquisitiveness, from such a remark as that which he had just uttered. Jeyes, to his own subsequent surprise, did not resent it in the slightest degree.

"Much as I admire your theater, Mr. Smythe," he said, "I can hardly agree with you that Lily—Miss Parradell—might not be happier if she abandoned it."

"You're mistaken, dear boy—quite mistaken, I assure you. If we were discussin'

women generally, I would agree with you to the uttermost. But it is otherwise with the born actress; especially when she has, so to speak, been reared in the profession. To deny Miss Parradell the exercise of her art, now that she has shown what is in her, would be a crime, and, as some diplomat put it, worse than a crime—a blunder. Don't you see what would happen? She would always be grievin' over a lost opportunity. Every time she sang a little song, or mimicked some celebrity, in her own home, people would say: 'Dear me, Mrs. So-and-so, I wonder you didn't go on the stage!' or, if they knew something of her history: 'Why did you ever leave the Pandora after making such a decided hit!' D'ye think that sort of thing conduces to steady runnin' in double harness? No, sir; it doesn't. It's as bad as a bearin' rein—a constant source of annoyance. Mind you, I'm speakin' of the artistic temperament, which doesn't find its outlet in makin' jam and fixin' frocks for the kiddies out of paper patterns at sixpence ha'penny a time."

Oddly enough, Jeyes experienced an unfathomable sense of satisfaction on hearing these words of wisdom from the lips of one so fully qualified to utter them. They counseled delay, and the necessity for delay had been worrying him ever since he first formed the

opinion that Lily Parradell was the one girl in the world he wanted to marry.

"I'm glad I've had this chat with you," he said. "I make no secret of the fact that I mean to—that I hope to have the honor of asking Lily to be my wife—one of these days. But not yet . . . I must see my way a little clearer. . . . You understand, Mr. Smythe, there are difficulties for an army man. . . . And I'm keen on making Lily happy when I do provide a home for her."

Carlton Smythe's eyes twinkled, no doubt with heartfelt appreciation of such excellent sentiments.

"Exactly," he said. "In a year or two you will have laid your plans. By that time Miss Parradell will have established her fame, and, no matter whether she remains on the stage or leaves it, she will at least be rid of the canker of what might have been, which, like a boil, breaks out in unexpected places. . . . Well, shall I see to your note? The curtain is up."

It occurred to Jeyes, some months later, that the astute manager of the Pandora Theater had contrived to humbug him rather neatly. For the moment he was quite grateful to this kindly mentor who had helped to dissipate some of his qualms.

He was late in reaching his stall, and earned further unpopularity; but that did not trouble

him, because his thoughts were completely absorbed by his own affairs. Indeed, Nicholas Jeyes was somewhat of an egoist. With him impartial judgment meant the point of view which best suited his own ends, and now that he had seen the folly of attempting to dash to the ground the brimming cup just lifted to Lily Parradell's lips there was a most admirable reason for postponing the crisis which an open engagement would surely bring about.

Of course the average young man in love does not reason in that cold-blooded way; but Jeyes was not an average young man; he was a highly efficient officer in His Majesty's service, and, although indubitably in love, he thought it wise not to sacrifice his career for the sake of a wife—just yet. He was the sort of man who might blame the girl if his calculations did not accord with the facts; he might even try to force the facts to fit in with his calculations; but the gods are merciful to mankind in one respect—they veil the future in impenetrable mists, and if Jeyes was content with the present outlook, the gods were content to leave him so.

Lily was delayed that night. When she did at last appear through the stage-door, she was accompanied by a number of girls, all talking at once. For the hour, at any rate, her friends in the profession were devoid of the least envy,

and honestly rejoicing in the success of one of themselves. The goddess of fortune had smiled on Lily Parradell to-day; it might be the turn of Gabs, or Enid, or Nita, or Flo next week.

Scraps of eager talk which reached the waiting Jeyes were illuminating.

"My dear, you should have seen Eva Shafto watching you from the prompt side. If a look could have slain——"

Obviously Eva Shafto was the leading lady.

"Oh, Eva's all right. Sir George's motor was waiting for her. . . ."

"Vincent was delighted. You can always tell when he is pleased, because he sticks his thumbs in his waistcoat and stands with his feet wide apart. . . ."

"And look here, Lil, don't be silly and take the first figure Smythe offers you. Go to a good agent. It's worth paying the com. . . ."

"I ought to hate you, but I don't a bit, though the baron said Smythe told him he was keeping me in mind."

This from Enid Moncrieff, a willowy beauty, rather impressive in style. Lily burst through the lively crowd.

"Oh, girls, you've all been so good to me!" she cried. "Ah, there's Nicko. Is that brougham for me? How sweet of you! Don't forget Catani's at one, everybody. Nicko, I've

made my half-dozen fourteen. Do you mind, just this once? Then, with your six, we'll be a score—a musical score. Girls, I'm not so mad as I look if I can rap out a new wheeze. Good-by. I can't kiss you all, and my poor face is sticky with tears."

Jeyes was about to follow her into the brougham when the stage-door attendant rushed out. He was carrying a lustrous bouquet of red and white carnations.

" Beg pardon, miss," he said; " I was nearly forgettin' this. Miss Shafto left it for you."

A card pinned to a broad white ribbon bore the words, " With love and hearty congratulations from Eva Shafto."

" How kind—how very kind! " the girl almost sobbed. " Gabs, you cat," she shrilled suddenly, " take back what you said about Eva Shafto. She's sent me that ducky bouquet that was handed up to her after ' Star of Even ' to-night."

" Ass! " growled Jeyes to himself. He had forgotten to provide some flowers on this her great night. Were it not for the leading lady's graceful thought, Lily would have gone home lacking the tiniest spray of the actress's laurel.

In Wellington Street, Jeyes extended a lover-like arm, meaning to encircle the girl's waist. With a deft movement she eluded him.

" Not to-night, Nicko," she said. " Please

don't touch me to-night. Everybody in the theater embraced me till I wanted to scream."

"Everybody!"

"Well, the everybody of my small world."

"Men as well as women, I suppose?" in a savage tone that made her laugh hysterically. Then she began to talk, strangely, wildly, with a curiously pathetic break in her voice at times.

"Shocking, wasn't it? But they meant well, the dears. And I hadn't the heart to say, 'Mind the paint!' Don't be angry, Nicko.

"I shall hold you all the dearer
If you don't come any nearer.

There! You see I am still all of a whirl. I know I shall feel awful to-morrow if the people applaud me when I begin my song. . . . But didn't it go beautifully? And you were shouting with the best of them. I actually heard your voice, even in that din. . . . Nicko, shall I wake up in the morning and find that it was all a dream, and that poor ma and I must still keep on paying twelve shillings a week for apartments in the Kennington Park Road?—Apartments, with use of kitchen, and lock-up coal-cellar, and pop a penny in the slot when the gas goes out! Oh, my! Is that dingy prospect really vanishing out of our lives? Shall I earn a decent salary, and free my mother from the drudgery of cooking, and scrubbing,

and mending? Shall I be able to buy her nice clothes? Poor thing! she picked up a cheap dress last October—it would be warm for the winter, she said—and only the other day she told me that the summer was getting on so fast that she thought she would make her frock hold out till next spring. Good God! Nicko—the blue serge I am wearing cost her this year's dress, because she can *manage,* whereas I have to be decently clothed. Do you know the meaning of that word *manage?* You have taught me how to conjugate verbs, but that is a verb which is found only in the text-books of the poor. I have managed, thou shalt manage, he, or she, might, could, or should manage on thirty-five bob a week and pay your own fares."

Jeyes was suddenly gripped by a new emotion. Not being wholly a fool, he devoted himself to soothing her, to praising unstintedly, to promising fame and fortune. He told her of the nice things said by Carlton Smythe, by De Castro, by strangers in the audience. And when he bade her good-night, he simply pressed her hand, and promised to call next day in good time for the luncheon party.

He retired to rest rather more easy in mind. When all was said and done, it was more seemly that he should marry a celebrity than a mere chorus-girl, and any man would prefer that the woman he loved should be raised out of the

penury which constitutes London's gravest offense against its young and pretty girls. Then he fell asleep, and dreamed that Bertie Fulkerson had stabbed Sam de Castro with a large carving-knife, giving as a reason that "he was tired of Sam's white waistcoats."

The lunch at Catani's went off gaily, though it traveled on lines not contemplated by the giver of the feast. Lily Parradell, of course, was its bright, particular star, and Captain Nicholas Jeyes had the honor of paying the bill, but his part in the entertainment threatened to stop there. It was essentially a theatrical and Bohemian gathering, and if Jeyes had lived twenty years in the Quartier Latin it may be doubted whether on the twentieth anniversary he would have footed it in the right spirit at the "Qua'tz Arts" ball.

Lily, brimming over with delight, praised the charming flowers which decked the table, and Sam de Castro commented on the excellence of the wine, but Jeyes, strive as he might, and did, felt that he was in this company and not of it. Once, toward the close of the feast, he struck in valiantly.

"Dash it all!" he cried, "except Lil and Lal Roper, all of you call me Captain Jeyes. I won't stand it. My name is Nicko, and please don't forget it. Sorry, Bertie, I omitted you, but you are at the other end of the board. And

you, too, baron, even if you do call me Niggo. . . . Enid, here's to that song Carlton Smythe has in mind for you! . . . Vincent, may you write it, and a jolly good one, too! "

" Waiter! " cried Fulkerson, " fill two glasses! I have a couple of toasts to honor."

A laugh went around. Under cover of it Von Rettenmayer whispered to Enid Moncrieff:

" De wed blanked iss zdeaming."

" Who's a wet blanket, and why should it steam, and what on earth are you gassin' about? " demanded the young lady.

" Meine liebe, I'm dalking in barables."

" You're talkin' nonsense, if you ask me. . . . Capt—— well, Nicko, then—when did our worthy manager say anything about a new song for me, or even an old one, for that matter? "

" Ah, I mustn't reveal the secrets of the treasure-house. A man may smile, and smile, and be a villain, but if Enid smiles even a managerial ogre must yield."

That was his best effort. Carlton Smythe, not being a villain, smiled seraphically, and the ruthless Vincent Bland interfered by remarking that there was a " call " for three o'clock, and it was now 2.45.

That night Mrs. Upjohn came to the theater to hear her daughter's song, so there were three in the homeward-bound cab. On this occasion Jeyes had paid pounds for the right

sort of bouquet, which was handed over the footlights with fitting ceremony by the conductor. But to Jeyes's annoyance, there were four others—one from the company, three from unknown admirers. Next morning he received a note per boy-messenger.

"Dear Nicko," it ran. "I'm awfully sorry, but I can't meet you to-day. Too bad, isn't it, when you are off to the Curragh this afternoon? But C. S. and V. B. have been putting their heads together, and my part is to be made more of, and my song is transferred to the second act, and I'm in the theater now hard at work. There are people, you know, who dine late, and book stalls just to see one item, and the management think this may happen in my case. Flattering, but a nuisance, because rehearsal has started early and will end late. I hear that the libraries were getting anxious, so Carlton Smythe had to consider them. Never mind, dear, I'll write often, and the days will fly until you come again to dear old London town. Yours ever, Lil."

Fly, would they? Jeyes thought they would drag most infernally. Not another hour's leave was possible until the close of the autumn maneuvers; he had to plead "urgent private affairs" before his Colonel would listen to an application for the brief respite now ended.

He had been on the point of strolling out, but

a fine morning had lost its attraction, and he sauntered into the club smoking-room. There he picked up a newspaper, and, within a minute, was glowering angrily at a paragraph in a column headed " Notes and News."

" Yesterday," he read, " Captain Jeyes, of the North Devons, who is relaxing in town after the strenuous life of the Curragh, entertained a party of friends to luncheon at Catani's Restaurant, 459, Strand. Though the majority of the guests hailed from the Pandora Theater, society was represented by Mr. Bertie Fulkerson, diplomacy by Baron von Rettenmayer, of the German Embassy, the arts by Mr. Samuel de Castro, and the Stock Exchange by Mr. Lionel Roper. The *diva* of the function, moreover, was Miss Lily Parradell, who is already known to the smart set as the ' Mind the Paint Girl ' of the Pandora. Luigi catered in his inimitable way, and the fun was fast and furious; while not a few of the regular patrons of the restaurant were highly interested in learning that the new star was shining in their midst, and in broad daylight, which went to prove that her extraordinary attractiveness on the stage is by no means dependent on artifice." And so on, in excellent journalese.

The well-meaning scribe might have had no more sinister intent than to do a good turn both to Catani's and to Lily Parradell, but

Jeyes was still fuming over the *exposé*—for he regarded it as nothing less—while his luggage was being piled on a hansom.

"Hullo, Jeyes," said a man who had just emerged from the club, and was standing on the top step of the entrance. "Back to the army again?"

"Yes."

"Let me see. You're quartered at the Curragh, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You have my condolences. Beastly hole—all grass and furze. Still, I've had some fairly decent intervals there. Rippin' snipe shootin' within a few hours, an' the racin' isn't half bad. Have you hunted with the Kildare?"

"No."

"You're bally monosyllabic this mornin', Nicko. What's wrong? Got the hump?"

"Something of the sort. Good-by. . . . Euston, cabby!"

CHAPTER IV

THE DESCENT

JEYES never afterwards forgot that drive through London. Shaftesbury Avenue was "up," so the cabman, with the curious liking of his tribe for byways in preference to main thoroughfares, threaded the mean streets of Soho and East Marylebone. Somehow, this ignoble retreat through the slums of London did not offer a happy augury for the future. It looked to Jeyes as though he were passing from the glitter and brightness of metropolitan life into depths at once sordid and depressing. It did not help to cheer his gloom when, at a corner of Tottenham Court Road, he caught sight of a newspaper placard bearing a legend of singular personal interest. Staring black type announced that the Evening Something-or-Other contained a portrait and biography of the "Mind the Paint Girl" at the Pandora. On the impulse of the moment, he stopped the cab and bought a copy of the paper. Sure enough, a very fair picture of Lily Parradell appeared on an inner page, and the

printed details of her life were far more flattering than was warranted by the facts. Evidently, the department which dealt with the advertising "literature" of the Pandora Theater had prepared this glowing memoir, and, indeed, Jeyes fancied he could trace the same skilled hand that had aroused his ire by the paragraph in one of the morning journals.

This discovery, or guess, as it might be described more accurately, gave him to think. He had supposed that the reference to the complimentary luncheon at Catani's was a kindly puff, emanating from some journalist who frequented the restaurant, but now he had reason to suspect that the theater's press agent was embarking on a serious campaign in behalf of its latest celebrity. Each line of the laudatory notice bore witness to an intimate knowledge of Lily's career, a knowledge which suppressed or distorted her professional experiences until they were made to appear part of a settled plan that had resulted in her triumphant début as the "Mind the Paint Girl" at the Pandora. Even the account of her birth and upbringing was trimmed to suit the writer's intent. She was described as the only daughter of a successful merchant, who had been widely known and esteemed in the Battersea district until his lamented death some years earlier.

Jeyes knew the truth. He knew that a faded

little man had worked and striven until he was pushed out of a small shop by competition, and finally driven out of life itself—one among the thousands of unrecorded failures which London produces with such callous indifference. . . . Faugh! His strong hands crushed the newspaper into a ball, and he threw it into the roadway.

* * * * *

One day, sixteen months later, the senior Major of the North Devons, questioned on the point by a perplexed Colonel, admitted that Captain Jeyes " seemed to be losing grip." About the same period, the subalterns of the battalion, more brutally juvenile in the frankness of their judgment, had arrived at the conclusion that Jeyes was a " slacker."

There was a dreadful truth about both verdicts, and none knew it better than Nicko Jeyes himself. He had visited London four times during that weary year, and on each occasion had returned to the regiment less eager to advance in his profession, and more disconsolate because of the ever-widening gap between Lily Parradell's meteoric rise in public favor, and his own apparent anchorage in a backwater of routine.

It was not true, of course, that he was being overlooked by the authorities. It was not true that he had no career to look forward to. In

his saner moments he realized that hard work and faithful devotion to duty would surely earn promotion, more rapidly in his case than was attainable by thousands of other officers equally keen, equally well qualified for better things, but lacking the interest he could command. Had he never met Lily Parradell he would unquestionably have been happy and content, but her letters, each glowing eulogium in the press, every scrap of gossip retailed by the latest arrival from London, strengthened the conviction that she was drifting away from him—that while he remained in the army it was hopeless to think of marrying her.

At last the crash came—the battalion figured among the Indian reliefs for the next trooping season.

Jeyes, like every other man in the regiment, obtained short leave in his turn, and raced off to London. It must be now or never for him with Lily Parradell. She must either abandon the stage, marry him, and drop into the conventional round of the memsahib—who gives more to the Empire than her stay-at-home sister dreams of—or he must weigh in the scales an infatuation as opposed to a career.

He knew exactly what travail, and argument, and bitter family broils lay ahead. Rumor had been busy, even in quiet Huntingdon, and the mother had written to her soldier-son, implor-

ing him to cut loose from a connection which could not be other than harmful.

" I say nothing as to the personal qualities or charm of Miss Parradell," she wrote. " She must be both clever and fascinating, or she could never have made so great an impression on the play-going public of London. But she, and her like, should marry in their own class. Its members should not think of allying themselves with the men of our county aristocracy, who lead our public services almost by right of birth, and who, in their turn, should rear sons and daughters fitted to carry the flag to the far lands. Such girls do not make good mothers. In that sense, if in no other, they are a menace to society! "

Here, then, was a solid rock of prejudice awaiting him at Huntingdon.

Bob, his eldest brother, took a different line, but one equally emphatic. The newspaper account of the festivity at Catani's had found its way to distant Buluwayo, being copied and recopied until it appeared in a small local sheet months after the original publication in London, when, oddly enough, brother Bob had missed seeing it.

" Dear Nicko," he wrote. " Judging from the inclosed cutting, you seem to have been going it, date uncertain, but details convincing. Chuck it, dear boy! Give it the everlasting

shove! Our crowd looks rather out of place in such gatherings. I want to see your name in dispatches, not in the tittle-tattle of the *coulisses*. . . . I'm going strong out here, and hope to have a run home next year. It'll be rather rotten if I miss you, but a fellow in the Manchesters told me the other day that your battalion was due in India next cold weather. Of course, if that is so, we'll grumble and make the best of it. There is always a Jeyes somewhere on the frontier."

Sound, honest counsel, which wrung the withers of the recipient; nor was the situation improved, on the morning the letter arrived, by the fact that his Colonel sent for Jeyes and complained about the low musketry average attained by his company.

"It is the worst in the battalion, and used to be the best," he said. "Why is that? I always regarded you as my most promising officer in musketry instruction. A year ago you were a keen soldier, thorough in every respect, and particularly so on the range. What has happened? Can I help you in any way?"

The Colonel's tone was kindly, even if the words were uncompromising. Jeyes muttered miserably that he had been bothered by personal matters, but would endeavor to effect an improvement when the regiment went to India.

He hated to admit, even to himself, that he was acting foolishly. Yet it was borne in on him that the policy of drift was a complete failure, so he came to London in a mood to hurl thunderbolts and defy lightning.

" The Duchess of Brixton " was still running merrily. Eva Shafto had married her baronet, and Lily Parradell was appearing in the title-rôle. The song that made her famous had been dropped long ago, but its catchy refrain, and the still more catchy nickname it had conferred, would never be forgotten by her generation. To all London she was still the " Mind the Paint Girl." The curious appellation lent her a sort of protective aura. She was impulsive, good-hearted, lively, and outspoken as ever, but no man dared press acquaintance to the bounds of flirtation. Her profession, and especially the place she filled in it, might have been expected to expose her to the malice of the disappointed and the innuendo of scandal-mongers, but never a word was breathed against her. Perhaps the nebulous attachment between Jeyes and herself accounted for some part of this good repute; perhaps the fact that her mother was nominally mistress of the pretty house in Bloomsbury meant something; but the characteristics which that amazing song attributed to her stilled the tongue of gossip.

She was wealthy, as wealth goes on the stage. Her salary was magnificent, and she was worth every penny of it to the theater. Then, she had a stanch backer in Lionel Roper, a vastly different person on the floor of the Stock Exchange from the dapper little man who cavorted around the foyer of the Pandora, and entertained bevies of lissome beauties to supper at the Savoy. He made money for her in speculations which were under his own control, and she spent that portion of her income right royally. Her kindness was noteworthy, even in the annals of the most charitable of professions. Her purse was always open to a needy friend. It was enough for Lily Parradell to hear that some brother or sister mummer was in want, and she not only relieved temporary necessities, but, if the sufferer was not quite hopeless in a business sense, went out of her way to cajole managers into finding employment.

Of course, her matrimonial prospects were eagerly canvassed by her friends. Those who knew about Nicko Jeyes shook their heads over what they called "Lily's madness," while the larger circle, recking little of the claims of "some impecunious army man," vowed that their idol ought to marry a duke.

So Jeyes was coming into a hornets' nest when he stepped from the Irish mail at Euston

in the small hours of an October morning, and was rattled boldly to fate and his club in an antiquated four-wheeler.

He had announced his arrival by letter, and a telegram bidding him come to lunch awaited him. He knew what *that* meant—a noisy meal, shared with anyone who happened to drop in, and people were always dropping in on the Upjohn *ménage*. Three or four girls from the theater would certainly be present. They would chatter incessantly until someone remembered an appointment with a dressmaker, followed by another for tea at Rumpelmayer's, after which Lily must rest before going to the theater. When the " show " was over, ten to one there would be a supper at a restaurant or in somebody's rooms—perhaps an " At Home " or a dance—and most certainly no shred of opportunity for a quiet word with Lily.

So, being a masterful person, he sent her a note after breakfast, saying that he would be delighted to stay for lunch, but must have a talk earlier, and purposed calling at noon, or a few minutes before. He hoped she would reserve an unoccupied half-hour, and remained " Yours ever, Nicko."

Punctually at a quarter to twelve he alighted from a taxi at the door of a spacious house lavishly decorated with well-filled window-boxes. He was admitted by a supercilious par-

lor-maid, whose haughty demeanor did not abate one jot at sight of a privileged visitor.

"Mrs. Upjohn is not quite well this morning," she announced, "and Miss Parradell is out, but she left word that when you called you were to be shown into the drawing-room, and she would be home almost immediately."

"Do you know where Miss Parradell has gone?" inquired Jeyes severely. He thought Gladys was detestable, and wondered why either Mrs. Upjohn or Lily endured her airs and graces. If he had not been a man who took himself too seriously, he would have been amused at the girl, an excellent servant really, but far more unapproachable than her employers.

"Miss Parradell is at the photographer's," was the reply in a frosty tone, which implied that the lady in question was spending her time better and more profitably than by waiting at home to oblige Captain Jeyes.

Momentarily quelled, the visitor entered the drawing-room, and sat down, whereupon Gladys sailed out with a swish of starched linen.

Jeyes had not been in the room before, since Lily had only recently taken this comfortable Bloomsbury house, giving up a cozy flat situated in the same quarter. He glanced around now with a curiosity that was almost furtive in its close observation. The apartment stirred

up other memories. By contrast with the dingy folding-door suite in the Kennington Park Road, it was almost palatial.

If anything, the decoration and furniture were too elaborate. The walls were papered to represent large clusters of white and purple lilac. The chairs and no fewer than three settees were covered with a chintz of similar pattern, and the curtains, carpet, and lampshades corresponded with meticulous accuracy. A conservatory, partly visible, and of the kind which a certain style of London house often has over the portico, was plentifully stocked with flowers, and hung with a velarium and green sun-blinds. A grand piano heaped with music, and a writing-table carrying a telephone, gave evidence that the room was in daily and nightly use. The pictures were oddments—oil-paintings, water-colors and prints being mixed without the least regard to harmonizing with each other. They were not crude. Lily's many visits to art-galleries had at least saved her from the Christmas annual pot-boiler, but it was patent that her art-trophies had been picked up as fancy dictated and hung promptly in the first position that offered.

A heap of correspondence on the writing-table proved that the girl retained no secrets from her household. Among the letters Jeyes

saw his own, sent from the Curragh two days previously. That pile of opened letters, nearly all from people whose names were unknown to him, evoked a feeling of resentment. Not for the first time in his relations with Lily Parradell was he conscious of being almost an intruder. That was bad enough—the suspicion of its truth invariably annoyed him—but his temper was stirred to annoyance by the entrance of Gladys with a message.

"Mrs. Upjohn sends her compliments," she said, "and regrets she is unable to come down before luncheon. She is still indisposed."

Jeyes laughed angrily.

"Is that what Mrs. Upjohn said?" he exploded.

"Words to that effect, sir," said the superior parlor-maid; and she rustled out more noisily than before, leaving Jeyes to realize that he was behaving like an impertinent footman.

Luckily, he had not long to wait, for he was beginning to understand that any man may have nerves. He had crossed the room, and was looking out into one corner of a small square, when a smart landaulette automobile drew up in front of the door, and Lily appeared.

Her gown and her hat were in the fashion of the moment, but without any exaggeration. Her good taste invariably demanded restful colors, and she was always ready to subtract a

few inches from the diameter of a hat and add them to the length and circumference of a short skirt. But the veriest novice in the mysteries of woman's dress could see that her clothes were costly. Jeyes understood without being told that a quarter's pay would not meet the bills for Lily Parradell's simple morning outfit.

But that reflection did not disturb him—it was only reasonable that the leading lady of the Pandora Theater should be well and expensively attired; his heart throbbed now because of a new conceit. Lily Parradell, descending from her motor, bore an absurdly close resemblance to the young Marchioness of Kingston, whom he had received with almost royal honors at a recent prize-giving function in Ireland. Of the two, the actress carried herself the more daintily, and was unquestionably better dressed.

He gulped back a sigh. Lily had caught sight of him the instant she stood on the pavement; she smiled delightedly, waved a hand, and he read the movement of her lips though he could not hear her voice through the double windows.

" Ah, there you are! " she was saying, cheerful and friendly as ever.

In a few seconds she was in the room; flinging aside a parcel and an ermine muff, she threw her arms around him, and kissed him.

There was a candid camaraderie in the embrace which might have meant everything or nothing, but Jeyes was unversed in feminine subtleties, and the touch of her cool, red lips thrilled him to the core, while the sweet fragrance of her was intoxicating.

She seemed to be almost surprised when he would have held her close. Gently extricating herself, she laughed.

"It's good to see you again, Nicko," she said. "What fair wind has wafted you from Ireland? I was not expecting you till Christmas."

Jeyes, stupid man, deemed it best to take the plunge at once.

"You remember I told you that the battalion might be sent to India this cold weather?"

"Yes."

She turned to pick up the fallen muff.

"Well, we're under orders. We sail in the *Crocodile* four weeks from to-day."

"Oh, Nicko!"

She raised a scared face to his, and her air of alarm was somehow gratifying.

"You need not look so frightened," he laughed. "One would think I said Siberia, or some other ungodly hole from which people never come back. India is all right—a ripping place, especially for women."

"But, Nicko, how long will you be there?"

"Sixteen years, if you mean the battalion. If you mean me, it depends on you."

"On me?"

She had guessed his errand, and did not flinch from its discussion, though Jeyes attributed the sudden pain in her eyes to an unforeseen announcement.

"Sorry, dear, if I seem to have blurted out my news, but I'm so afraid that Jimmie Birch or Gabs Kato may be rushing in at any moment that I must cover the ground quickly."

He came nearer, put both hands on her shoulders, and looked her squarely in the eyes.

"It has come to this, Lil," he went on, speaking with a slow gravity that was compelling in its intensity, "you must come with me, or else I chuck the army. I must be near you. I can't live without you. Which is it to be? We get married, and go to India, or——"

"Or what, Nicko?"

"I don't know, dear—I don't know."

There were a great many things he did not know, and one of them was that Lily Parradell had to summon all her strength of will to avoid bursting into tears without further ado. With a splendid fortitude she called to her aid a thoughtful and business-like expression which was far from answering to her real feelings. Lifting his hands from her shoulders, she nodded towards a chair.

"Let's sit down, Nicko, and talk this over."

He obeyed her, but, heroic in his egotism, floundered blindly along the track he had marked out.

"I've tried to hint at this development each time we met during the past year," he said.

"This is the first time you have asked me to marry you, Nicko," she answered gravely, seating herself at some little distance.

"Well, perhaps it is, in so many words. But you knew, you knew."

"I can't honestly say that you have taken me unawares, for I have given some thought to it. I have looked on marriage as one of those possibilities of the future that we all have in mind more or less. But do you really expect me to abandon my career at its very outset——?"

"What about me, Lil?" he broke in, with a certain heat of expostulation. "Isn't that the only alternative you leave me?"

"I am not bidding you give up the army, Nicko," she said.

"No, but it amounts to the same thing. Do you think I'd be content to go away to India and leave you in London?"

"Why not? Other men and women have to endure separation. Why should we escape?"

"You're putting the responsibility on me,"

he protested, and in his frantic striving to think clearly, to pick and choose with care among the furious words jostling each other in his mind, he did not see that a girl in whose veins the red blood had the quality of quicksilver was sitting quiet as a stone.

"It is you who have to decide—not I," he said thickly, after a slight pause. "I have weighed the pros and cons of it, Lil, during many a long day and sleepless night. In fact, I've rather gone to pieces because of the worry. I feel, in a sort of way, that I'm demanding an unfair sacrifice on your part, but I can't go to the other side of the earth for years and leave you here. Never to see you, never to hear from you till three weeks after you had posted a letter—— I can't do it, Lil, and, what is more, I won't!"

"Do you believe I wouldn't wait for you?" she murmured, stirred to compassionate regret by this agonized avowal from a man usually so self-contained.

"I daren't risk it," he blurted forth.

"Risk what?"

"Risk losing you. Good God! Lil, do you know what love is? You are made for love, if ever any woman was. Don't you understand that the mere notion of some other man winning you is enough to drive me mad?"

"Perhaps you are right, Nicko. Perhaps I

am selfish, but not in the way you imagine. There are others to think of——"

"Others?"

He almost snorted the word. He had not the slightest suspicion that an impartial listener might allot the burden of selfishness differently as between these two.

"Yes," she sighed. "First, there's mother. I haven't been rich very long, Nicko, and I have no money saved, although I earn a fine salary. And you wouldn't want to take *her* to India, would you?"

She hardly expected an answer, even if she did hesitate a fraction of a second, but her hearer was still busily engaged in nursing his own woes.

"Then, there is Carlton Smythe, and the people in the show," she continued hurriedly. "We can't leave them altogether out of consideration. Carlton has counted on the run of 'The Duchess of Brixton' lasting another six months—he told me that the other day, and it isn't merely vain of me to say that the piece depends wholly on me—it is simply common sense. The novelty of the music and the situations has gone long ago; the public come to see *me,* just because I have been well advertised. It would be horribly mean if I abandoned the theater at a week's notice. Like you, Nicko, I must say I can't do it."

He rose to his feet with the air of a man whose resolution is fixed. He bent over her tenderly, breathlessly.

"But you'll marry me, Lil. Say you'll marry me," he gasped.

"Oh, Nicko," she almost sobbed, "you make it very hard for me. You know I won't marry any other man. I don't want to marry anyone yet. But why should you give up your profession on that account? . . . It's wrong—it's a mistake—you'll regret it some time, and then you'll blame me."

The door opened. Mrs. Upjohn appeared, her matronly figure wrapped in a négligé of striking Japanese pattern.

"'Ow are ye, Captin?" she cried affably. "'Ow d'ye like our new 'ouse? Classy, ain't it?"

Then her glance fell on her disconsolate daughter.

"Why, Lil, whatever's the matter?" she demanded. "'Oo's bin upsettin' ye?"

Without waiting for a reply, she turned on Jeyes, and the friendliness had fled from her good-natured face.

"What 'ave you bin sayin' to Lil?" she cried. "She was lively as a kitten when she went out this mornin'. A nice thing, comin' 'ere——"

"Mother!" broke in the girl, bestirring her-

self in sheer desperation, "please don't say another word. You're quite mistaken. Captain Jeyes was just telling me that he does not care to go to India with his regiment, so he is leaving the service. That's all."

"An' enough, too," vowed Mrs. Upjohn, still suspicious, and only half appeased. "'Ow's 'e goin' to make a livin', after bein' in the army all these years? 'Stick to the job you understand,' your poor father used to say. Look at you, Lil. What would 'ave 'appened to us if you 'adn't——"

Fortunately, the door was flung wide again, this time by an entrancing young lady in a directoire frock. Petite, bright-eyed, and extremely chic in style, Miss Jimmie Birch, a favorite in the Pandora and out of it, bounded into the room.

"How do, everybody!" she cried. "You here again, Nicko? Do you boys in the army ever do any work? It doesn't look like it. . . . And, oh my!—what's the matter with *you,* Lil? Been to the dentist, or just going?"

"Something of the sort," said Lily. "Amuse Nicko—will you, Jimmie?—till I rush to my room and dab my face with eau de Cologne!"

CHAPTER V

IN THE DEPTHS

TWENTY-FOUR hours after his return to London Jeyes was summoned to Huntingdon. As the military euphemism puts it, he had asked to be allowed to resign his commission, and, having taken the most irrevocable step, was already beginning to regret it, when an ominous message from his old home banished all other considerations. A telegram addressed to the Curragh had been re-telegraphed to his club, and the text was sufficiently alarming: "Come at once," it read. "Your mother is seriously ill.—Mortimer."

The sender, he knew, was his mother's medical attendant. He caught the next train from King's Cross, and astonished Dr. Mortimer by meeting him at the garden gate of "Ambala," a house named after the first Indian station commanded by the late General Jeyes.

"You here, Nicko?" cried the doctor. "I didn't expect you till some time to-morrow."

"I was in town, and your wire followed me. My mother is better, I hope? What's wrong with her?"

Dr. Mortimer hesitated. This man was a soldier, and it would be no kindness to deceive him, even for a day. Still——

"Mrs. Jeyes is seriously ill——" he began, but the other interrupted, with something of panic in face and voice.

"I know that," he said. "The telegram told me as much. Man, don't say she is dead!"

"No, Nicko, but she will not recover."

Jeyes almost reeled. Had some evil report reached quiet Huntingdon long before he had been able to prepare the way? Did his mother know he had sent in his papers? Had she collapsed under the blow? God! Was he to go through life believing he had killed her?

"You must bear up, Nicko," said the kindly doctor, interpreting a son's emotion in the only possible way. "She has been ill a long time —influenza, complicated by heart trouble—but she would not hear of your being sent for until some one happened to mention, late last night, that the North Devons were under orders for India. Then she yielded, fearing lest, even if she rallied, she might never see you again. . . . Nicko, you are just in time. It is a strange thing that you should happen to be so near. . . . To-morrow would have been too late!"

"Oh, thank Heaven for that small mercy!" muttered Jeyes, hurrying towards the house without another word.

Mortimer gazed after him pityingly.

"He has taken it worse than I would have imagined," he thought, though not altogether with surprise, because big stolid men of the Jeyes stamp often break down more completely under the stress of sudden grief than those of a more nervous temperament. He could not know the true motive inspiring that curt thanksgiving to Providence.

Mrs. Jeyes was far beyond the stage when a lifelong acquaintance with army ways must have set her wondering how Nicko came to be by her side so promptly. She smiled a welcome, and feebly pressed his hands. And that was all. The mother passed away into the long night without ever a moment of real anguish caused by her soldier son. . . .

He roused himself from a stupor of grief in order to cable the disastrous tidings to Bob, in Buluwayo, and to Nigel, the student of the family, now earning fame as a railway construction engineer in the Argentine. The problem presented itself—should he tell Lily at once? The hour was rather late. She would be preparing for the theater, and the suddenness of the thing might interfere with her work. He decided, with a certain grimness, that the business of the Pandora Theater took precedence over his private affairs, so he wrote.

Next morning came a telegram:

" My love and heartfelt sympathy with you in your irreparable loss.—LILY."

It comforted him strangely. No matter what clouds there were in his life, Lily always rang true. She could have chosen no phrase more grateful, more subtly healing. It was Lily herself speaking—tender-hearted, affectionate, impulsive Lily Parradell.

* * * * *

His mother's will named as her executor or executors " such of my sons as may happen to reside in the United Kingdom at the time of my death." The tears rose to the man's eyes when he heard the simple words. They had come from no lawyer-like mint. They were eloquent of the unswerving devotion of an Englishwoman to England. Her husband, her sons, she herself during many years—had they not gone, each and all, north and south, east and west, when duty called? Scattered from pole to pole, charting the trackless depths of ocean, the bones of our English dead mark the ever-widening bounds of Empire. And who knew it better than she? During the forty years of her life since she became a woman she had always been ready to die, or to suffer a loss more bitter than death in the service of her country. Yet the gods were kind to her.

Her three sons were alive, and she herself was laid to rest by the side of her dear husband.

So the black days passed, and Jeyes scarce realized all that he had lost until he found himself in London once more, bereft of a mother he had loved more than he knew, and minus a profession.

* * * * *

At first he shrank, almost with terror, from the well-meaning inquiries of friends.

" Hullo, Nicko," some man in the army who knew him would say, " sorry to hear of your bad news; but why the dickens did you chuck the service? "

Then, when his old battalion was hurried to the front " to get licked into shape " in one of Britain's little wars beyond the Indus, some heedless blatherer would condole with him.

" Rotten bad luck for you, Nicko, leaving the regiment before you heard of this scrap. It's not goin' to be a walk-over. You saw that poor Montagu and Lawson were nipped in a rear-guard action the other day."

Yes, he knew; Montagu was junior Major and Lawson senior Captain. Jeyes would have obtained his majority four years ahead of the ordinary course of events. But why tell him that, *now?*

He quitted the club. Not only was this step made imperative by a rule forbidding continu-

ous residence, but he had grown shy of meeting old brother-officers. He took rooms in Jermyn Street, and flung himself headlong into the curiously mixed and cosmopolitan society which fluttered mothlike around the steady flame of the Pandora Theater.

Lily Parradell began by being genuinely concerned about his future; she urged him constantly to take up a secretaryship, or "something." She even offered to secure valuable introductions to City men, by using the good offices of Carlton Smythe or Lionel Roper. But he rejected such intermediaries.

"Don't worry your pretty little head about me," he would say. "No matter what happens, I have more than enough to live on decently, and some opening must present itself soon which will pay me better than smugging at company law in the hope of earning a hundred and fifty a year. What good is that to you and me—now, I ask you?"

What, indeed? Added to his own six hundred, it meant hardly as much in twelve months as Lily Parradell earned in two. Her salary was one hundred pounds a week, and, if so inclined, she could quadruple that sum during certain weeks in the season by appearing at private houses in the West End. On such occasions she was invariably urged to sing "Mind the Paint." She had dozens of better songs

in her *répertoire,* but there was always some foreign notability or American millionaire in the company anxious to hear the " Mind the Paint Girl " in her most famous rôle.

So Nicko Jeyes, the erstwhile smart soldier, developed into a kind of retriever, trained to fetch and carry, and escort his mistress when required. But he lacked some of the fine qualities of the dog. He could be ill-tempered and peevish, and would snap unexpectedly. Then Lily would flare into rebellion, and hot words would fly, and next day she would pet her " dear old Nicko," and soothe him into good behavior and placid servitude once more.

Such a state of things could not endure. She was too high-spirited a girl, he too proud a man, to remain bound indefinitely by a tie so vague. Neither suspected it, but a crisis was approaching in their lives, and the hour of trial and real humiliation came when Robert Jeyes returned from South Africa.

He, bluff and hearty man of the world, bronzed by the southern sun, and taught by the free companionship of the veldt to judge his fellows openly and fearlessly, cast a critical eye over Nicko and his surroundings, and, to use his own forcible phrasing, " sized up the situation in a tick."

" You're running to seed here, dear boy," he said, when the two were dining together one

night soon after the elder brother's arrival in London. "What's come over you? You're not the same man I left here nearly three years ago. I was never more surprised in my life than when you wrote saying you had stopped following the drum. Of course, we were all horribly cut up by the dear old mater's death, and, in a sense, it was harder for you than for Nigel or myself; but, bad as it was, *that* didn't account for your sudden collapse. . . . What was it?"

"What is it always, or nine times out of ten?" asked Nicko morosely.

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"*The* woman?"

"One doesn't go to the devil for the sex at large, Bob."

Robert Jeyes laughed. He was dissecting an orange deliberately.

"Of course, I meant the one woman with whom I have heard your name bracketed—the 'Mind the Paint Girl.'"

"Her correct name is Lily Parradell," said the younger man sharply.

"Her stage name—yes. I have been told that her correct name is Upjohn, and that her father——"

"She makes no secret of her birth or parentage," broke in Nicko. "She has kept me

dangling about unconscionably, I must admit, but, for all that, she is the best-hearted, and cheeriest, and most charming woman in London."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," agreed Robert instantly. "Fellows who came out from home were always raving about her. I almost regretted that business kept me so long on the wrong side of the line that I hadn't a chance of hearing her. They said she used to skip about the stage like a fairy."

"My dear fellow, you are talking of ancient history. Lily Parradell does ten times the work now that she did then. If you want to see her at her best, come with me to the Pandora Theater to-morrow evening."

"Sorry, Nicko, but I can't—to-morrow. I am booked for Peter Chalmers's uncle. Peter is one of my partners, you know."

"Well, that can stand over; but I want you to meet Lily. To-morrow is her birthday. Other things being equal, I shall get up a little supper at Catani's after the theater—say 11.30. Chalmers is a quiet old bird, I fancy, so you'll be free at that hour. Have a taxi waiting. They take you anywhere in ten minutes."

Bob did not answer at once. He signed to a waiter to bring the coffee and cigars.

"Let me understand matters fully, Nicko," he said, when they were able to talk unre-

servedly once more. "Are you engaged to Miss Parradell?"

"Yes, in a sort of a way."

"But a man doesn't marry a woman 'in a sort of a way.'"

"I was going to explain. Lily and I were very good friends before she made the hit that put her bang in front on the musical comedy stage. If I had married her then all would have been well. But—I was in the army—and the mater was living—and there were, or there seemed to be, fifty good reasons for delay. So, like a fool, I played the waiting game."

"One minute—did mother ever know?"

"About Lily? No, not exactly, that is. She had heard something, and wrote me about it, discussing marriage with an actress as a general proposition. Need I tell you what line she took?"

Robert Jeyes was endowed with the quality of tact in which his brother was so conspicuously lacking. He evaded the direct question by putting another.

"If I remember rightly," he said, "she died without knowing that you had sent in your papers?"

"Yes, thank the Lord!"

Robert nodded. He was trying to help Nicko over his fences.

"Sorry, but I interrupted you," he said.

"Lily's success changed the whole perspective. From being a chorus-girl, earning a couple of guineas a week, she sprang to a thousand, two thousand, five thousand a year. One doesn't take such kangaroo jumps on an army pay-sheet. *I* stopped just where I was. With average luck, my princely remuneration might rise from 11s. 7d. a day to 13s. 7d., in five or six years, if I behaved myself, and passed the staff examination."

He spoke bitterly, and Robert was content to say:

"Of course, Nicko, one doesn't enter the service to make money. For six generations there has always been a Jeyes with the colors——"

"Till I made a fool of myself."

"I didn't imply that. I don't even think it. Like every other human institution, the army is changing. If it demands the whole time of good men, it will have to make it worth their while. But let us keep to the one topic—this indefinite engagement of yours."

"It is not indefinite. Lily will marry me when I can afford to keep her in something like the style she has won for herself."

"I see. Of course a young lady at the top of the theatrical set lives under heavy current expense. You could give her a better time on three thousand a year than she has now on five.

In other words, you have to multiply your present income by five. How do you purpose doing it? "

Nicko chuckled dryly, and poured out a glass of port.

" I dislike arithmetical problems after dinner," he said. " Suppose you tell me something about your Buluwayo property. . . . Bob, I wish to goodness you had gone into the Service instead of me. To look at you now, it seems the silliest sort of nonsense that anyone should have regarded you as phthisical."

" There's a lot of silly things in the world which have the unfortunate drawback of being true. The dry air of the veldt has done wonders for me, but if I were to remain here during one cold, raw, damp spring I should be barking again. . . . But, no jibbing, Nicko. Let's get this heart-to-heart talk finished now. . . . I'm not a marrying man, for the best of reasons. Of course, if my health continues to improve, I may develop the amococcus microbe some fine day. But, without positive experience, I've formed a theory on the point. If I loved a girl, an' she loved me, I'd expect her to come along to Buluwayo or any other old place."

" And give up five thousand a year that she was making off her own bat? "

Robert blew a big ring of smoke into the air, and shot a number of smaller rings through it.

" It's a deuce of a lot of money," he mused aloud. " I fancy it can't last many years, and, as I've said before, it really doesn't mean the same amount earned by a man as the head of a household. Let us balance the ledger. On the one side you have the theater, day in and day out, with a few hours of giddy whirl strictly within the four-mile radius. Artificial, every minute of life. Motor, dresses, hotel bills, jewelry, top rates for every mortal thing—not much left out of the five thou'. On the other side, the hypothetical Mrs. Jeyes would live a free, unfettered, delightful life in Rhodesia. She'd move in good society, a dam sight better than she meets in London. . . . Oh, I know what I'm talking about. Our people out there are the right sort—not the effeminate dandies and painted dolls who form the majority of any crowd you mix with in town. Dash it all, Nicko, if the girl's heart is sound and her brain clear, she won't keep a man hanging after her here when happiness and a home are waiting for her out there."

Robert Jeyes had made, for him, two rather long speeches. But he had said what he meant to say, while leaving unsaid those things which might hurt and rankle, so, in that respect, his remarks were a model of good oratory.

Nicko was more deeply moved than he cared to show. He remained silent for fully a min-

ute. When he spoke, it was not to controvert his brother's philosophy, but to thank him.

"You're a decent chap, Bob," he said, "but that's nothing new. You were never anything else. Are you offering me a job on your farm?"

"Yes; Peter and I, and Jim Dalby, of course, had a long jaw before I sailed. We want someone we can trust to act as our agent. We'd put you in the way of it, and one or other of us would be on the spot for a year or more, and, in the meantime, we'd be striking out in other directions. There ain't millions in farming or trading, but there's a glorious life an' a comfortable one, and enough to provide for the missus and the kids when the rain falls. What do you say to it?"

"You don't want me to decide at once?"

"No. There's no special hurry. You can't expect any girl to make up her mind on such an important matter in less time than she'd take to choose a summer hat. You see, I'm allowing for the fact that you mean to consult Miss Parradell. Mind you, I'd be delighted if she'd marry you and come out. She must be a jolly decent sort of girl if one quarter of what I've heard of her is correct. . . . But there must be no shirking the issue, Nicko. . . . I hate to see you wasting the best years of your life in a way that's not—well, I must put it frankly—

that's not creditable to you or to any of us, either those who are left or those who have gone."

A third long speech, but this time it held a barbed shaft that was not blunted because of a fraternal anxiety to come to the rescue.

The younger man flushed deeply. He felt the thrust, and his incurable self-love was wounded.

" You haven't quite realized the difficulties that beset me," he muttered. " Somehow it sounds childish for a grown man to plead an infatuation as an excuse. But it exists, so why try to ignore it? And there is one element in the situation which has escaped you. I might —I could—have married Lily Parradell three years ago and have remained in the Army. Suppose I had? What a hullabaloo there would have been in the family! Great Scott! It would have caused almost as much heart-burning as if I had embezzled the canteen funds, and far more, I do honestly believe, than if I had done a bunk with the Colonel's wife."

Robert laughed cheerfully. He had contrived to put his point of view unmistakably before his stiff-necked brother, and that would suffice.

" Conditions change as the years roll on," he said. " Our dear old dad remembered the time when his regiment boasted the proud possession of a bottle-nosed Major who could drink any officer in the British Army under the

table. Nowadays, that sort of Major doesn't exist—in a mess, at any rate."

Nicko felt that Bob had shelved the fresh discussion he was raising, and shelved it rather skillfully, too.

"We haven't settled about to-morrow night," he said. "If I arrange that party, will you come?"

"Delighted! Any possibility of an understandin' bein' reached between you and the lady in the interim?"

"Yes, there's a chance. I'll be fetching her from the theater to-night."

"When she's tired, and inclined to be snappy, I'll go bail. Not a word of it to-night, Nicko, unless you want to fail at the first pop out of the box."

"Well, then, to-morrow afternoon, though, being her birthday, she'll be having lots of callers."

"Don't press, dear boy. 'Colts on the curb, but fillies on the snaffle,' isn't half a bad rule. But, should you have mentioned South Africa for the honeymoon, give me the office, that's all, and I'll shape my talk according, which is bad grammar, but I hate adverbs—don't you? They ought to be kept for flappers' academies only."

Nicko saw the drift of his brother's outspoken diplomacy. The day of shuffling was

past; it must be now or never for the loose end of the Jeyes family. He laid his plans cautiously, and was so thoughtful during the homeward drive from the Pandora that Lily chaffed him about it.

" You remind me of Vincent Bland after tea," she said.

" Why after tea particularly? " he asked.

" Because by that time he knows what has won the big race, and is bothering his brains to account for the strange loss of form in the horse he backed."

" He bets rather a lot, doesn't he? " went on Jeyes, feeling that the conversation was following a safe line.

" Far too much. And he has promised me to give it up I don't know how often. Oh, Nicko, I'm glad you haven't got that failing. It would worry me dreadfully if you took to betting."

Jeyes smiled, though not because of an unctuous self-righteousness. He could not help thinking that next day he was taking an outside chance which would have appalled even the sporting Vincent Bland, in proposing that the " Mind the Paint Girl " should fly from London to the wilds of Rhodesia merely to oblige him, Nicko Jeyes.

But, *vous l'avez voulu, Georges Dandin, vous l'avez voulu,* and Jeyes was just the kind of

man who would blame anybody other than himself if the experiment went wrong. Eighteen months earlier Lily had summed him up accurately with one lightning-clear glimpse of a woman's intuition.

CHAPTER VI

THE PLOT

WHEN he chose Lily Parradell's birthday as the day on which he would put his fortunes to the test, Nicko Jeyes, as it happened, was running counter to the designs of several other people, few of whom were his friends, while some, if not avowed enemies, at least made common cause against his self-assertive arrogance where Lily Parradell was concerned.

Set stubbornly on his own purpose, he was superbly indifferent to the thoughts and feelings of either friend or foe. In pursuance of a settled plan, he resolved to drop in on the Upjohn household about tea-time. The place would surely be crowded with Lily's friends, theatrical and otherwise, but Mrs. Upjohn would rout them when the hour came for Lily to eat a slight meal and to rest before going to the theater. He counted then on securing an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*.

It was not wholly surprising that Jeyes should regard an extraordinary enterprise with a degree of hopefulness. A strong-minded

man, dominated by what W. S. Gilbert so happily described as "hard-boiled egotism," he would naturally thrust his own interests into the foremost place. He accepted most thoroughly Shakespeare's cheering dictum that "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune," and, whatever the outcome might be, it was unquestionable that an irresistible tide was running in Nicko Jeyes's life at that moment. In fact, a powerful adverse current was making its influence felt a good hour or more before the time he had fixed upon for the visit to Bloomsbury.

The earliest caller admitted by the superior parlor-maid was a tall, immaculately dressed young man, whose bearing and appearance suggested the soldier. Indeed, a well-informed critic might have reasoned more closely, and detected a Guardsman. He was a good-looking youngster, about twenty-five years of age, and his manner held that charming sense of deference to the opposite sex which wins instant approval, whether from parlor-maid or countess. Even the frigid Gladys smiled almost affably.

"No, my lord, Miss Parradell is not at home," she said, "but she will be here soon, and I was told to ask any friends who came to wait in the drawing-room."

Lord Farncombe promptly accepted this gen-

eral invitation. Rather contrary to his expectation, he found himself alone in the drawing-room. Gloves, hat, and cane in hand, he seated himself in an arm-chair in the middle of the room, and glanced round. On pedestals, on a console-table, on a china cabinet, on one of the settees, on the tea-table, even upon the floor, stood huge baskets of flowers, and other handsome floral devices in various forms, each with a card attached. Lying higgledy-piggledy on the writing-table were a heap of small packages, mainly jewelry cases, some opened and some closed, and a litter of paper and string. Every package and case had its accompanying card or letter; Lily Parradell was popular among friends whom she could reckon by the score, and few of them had forgotten the significance of the date.

Lord Farncombe's gaze rested with approval on one particularly effective bouquet, composed exclusively of Frau Karl Druschki and La France roses, to which, possibly because of its size and beauty, a special place of prominence on the piano had been accorded. At last a somewhat striking portrait of Lily Parradell herself, not in one of her stage characters, but severe in its simplicity, caught his eye. He was rising to examine it more closely when the door was opened, and Lionel Roper entered.

The stockbroker—one of those tubby, cheer-

LILY PARRADELL'S BIRTHDAY PARTY IN THE FOYER OF THE PANDORA THEATRE

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ful, bald-headed little men who seem never to grow older—greeted the young Guardsman cordially.

"Hullo!" he cried, "I'm in luck at last! Just the chap I'm hunting for. How d'ye do, Lord Farncombe? How d'ye do?"

Farncombe shook hands, and managed to conceal any surprise he may have felt, either because of Roper's enthusiasm, or of the very striking and gorgeous waistcoat that "Uncle Lal" was wearing. Moreover, Gladys came to his aid. Having shown Mr. Roper into the room, she remained in the doorway, and watched his effusiveness with her habitually scornful air.

"I'll tell Mrs. Upjohn you're here," she said.

"Oh, ta!" replied Roper, without looking at her, and Gladys disappeared.

"Phew, it's hot!" he went on, vigorously mopping his domed forehead.

"Miss Parradell is out," said Farncombe.

Roper nodded, and took off his gloves. Evidently he was quite at home here.

"She won't be long, I dare say," he commented, beaming around the room with marked appreciation of its unusual contents.

"I've brought her a few flowers," said Farncombe, rather at a loss to maintain the conversation.

"Oh, have you?" said Roper. "I've sent her a trifle of jewelry."

The Guardsman glanced at the writing-table.

"She seems to have received quite a lot of jewelry," he said.

"Yes, by Jove, doesn't she? Ah, there's my brooch!" and Roper bustled across to the table to pick up one of the cases and gloat over it.

Farncombe came a little nearer.

"I didn't consider I'd a right to offer her anything but flowers, on so slight an acquaintance," he explained modestly.

Roper grinned acceptance of such an excellent sentiment.

"Exactly, but I'm an old friend, you know. Plenty of time for a youngster like you. Perhaps by her next birthday——"

"I hope so."

The two smiled at each other, and Roper read something in the younger man's face which encouraged him to unfold the scheme he had in mind. He approached Farncombe closely, and took hold of the lapel of his coat.

"Look here," he said confidentially, "are you doing anything to-night?"

"I—I shall be at the theater, of course."

"Oh, we shall all be at the theater, to shout 'Many Happy Returns' and kick up a general

shindy. Later, I mean—after the show. Are you free? "

"There is nothing that I can't get out of," said Farncombe eagerly.

"Good. Well, you see, it's this way. Smythe is giving Lily a bit of a supper in the foyer, with a dance on the stage to follow—quite a sociable affair—about five-and-twenty people all told. Will you come? "

"If Mr. Smythe is kind enough to ask me," began Farncombe.

"He *does* ask you, through me," said the impetuous Roper. "He's left all the arrangements to me and Morrie Cooling. Carlton never did anything in his life; *I* egged him on to this. I've been sweating at it since eleven o'clock. I haven't been near the city—not near it. There'll be a hue and cry out for me soon from my office. . . . Well? "

There was no need to ask the young officer whether or not the invitation was agreeable to him. His eyes glowed, and he beamed down on the little stockbroker as though the latter had just conferred on him the dearest wish of his heart.

"I shall be delighted," he said; and there was no doubting the genuineness of the conventional phrase on this occasion.

"Splendid! " said Roper, with a self-satisfied air. "I've been trying to get on to you

all day. I've called twice at your club, and at St. James's Place."

" Sorry you've had so much trouble."

Roper bounced down on to the settee in front of the writing-table, and applied his handkerchief again vigorously. Small and mercurial, he was singularly lively in his actions, and did everything with a zest, whether it was heading a daring attack by the " bulls," or taking a pretty girl in to supper.

" There'll be the baron," he said confidentially, " Sam de Castro, Bertie Fulkerson, Stew Heneage, Jerry Grimwood, Colonel and Mrs. Stidulph—you know the Stidulphs; she used to be Dolly Ensor—and ourselves, besides Cooling and Vincent Bland, and the pick o' the company. Catani does the food and drink. Phew! I don't believe I've forgotten a single thing."

Then his tone changed to one of deep import. He pointed to the arm-chair, from which Farncombe had risen. " Sit down a minute," he went on, sliding along the settee, so as to come nearer. " Are you waitin' to see Lily this afternoon? "

" I—I should like to," said Farncombe diffidently.

" Because if Jeyes should happen to drop in while you are here——"

" Captain Jeyes? "

"Yes, Nicko Jeyes—or if you knock up against him to-night at the theater—mum about this."

"About the supper, you mean?"

Roper nodded emphatically.

"Yes, of course. We don't want Nicko Jeyes; we simply don't want him. And if he heard that you and some of the boys were coming, he might wonder why *he* wasn't included."

Viscount Farncombe considered the point for a moment.

"He strikes me as being a rather surly, ill-conditioned person," he remarked, seeing that Roper evidently expected him to say something.

"A regular loafer," agreed the other.

"He appears to live at Catani's. I never go there without meeting him."

The stockbroker spread wide his hands and pursed his lips. He had never forgiven Nicko for daring to thrust himself into Lily Parradell's life.

"Exactly," he said, affecting an air of commiseration. "Catani's and a top back bedroom in Jermyn Street, and hanging about the Pandora—that's Nicko Jeyes all the time."

Farncombe hardly cared to enter *con amore* into a backbiting discussion regarding anyone

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whom Lily Parradell received on the terms which he fancied were accorded to Jeyes.

"He's quite an old friend of Mrs. Upjohn's, and of Miss Parradell's too, isn't he?" he asked.

Roper evaded the point.

"Known 'em some time, of course," he answered airily. "That's it. That's the complete explanation. Lily's so jolly faithful to her old friends."

"*You* oughtn't to complain of that," commented Farncombe smilingly.

"Oh, but I'm a *real* friend," declared Roper. "I've always been a patron of musical drama—it's my fad; and I kept an eye on Lily long before she sprang into prominence. Do you remember: 'Mind the paint! Mind the paint!'" and he sang the words gayly. "Why, I've looked after her like a father. 'Uncle Lal,' she calls me."

Seeing that his hearer was somewhat taken aback by the decisive claim he had put forward to exercise an avuncular right of discretion with regard to Lily's associates, he added reassuringly:

"I'm a married man, you know; but the wife has plenty to occupy her with the kids, and she leaves the drama to me. She prefers Bexhill."

Then, thinking to strike the iron while it

was hot, he leaned forward and spoke with great emphasis.

"Farncombe, what a charming creature!"

"Mrs. Roper?" inquired the Viscount innocently.

"No, no, dash it all! I'm talking about Lily. Oh, and so's my missus, for that matter, when she chooses. . . . But Lily Upjohn——" His cracked voice rose in a crescendo of admiration.

"Ah," said Farncombe, in the low, reverent tone of one speaking of a goddess, "she's beautiful—perfectly beautiful!"

"Yes, and as good as she's beautiful—you take it from me."

Feeling he had gone far enough, he dismissed the topic with a wave of the hand.

"Well, if you see Jeyes, you won't——" he ended abruptly.

But Farncombe fully understood.

"Not a syllable," he said.

Roper, virtuously conscious that he had done his duty, rose and walked across the room, yielding to that incurable propensity of his to be always on the move.

"I've warned the others," he began, but broke off to say hastily, "By-the-by, if Lily should mention the supper in the course of conversation, remember, *she's* not in the conspiracy——"

"Conspiracy?"

The younger man did not seem to like the word, but the *deus ex machina* of a scheme which contemplated the shutting out of an undesirable from that night's joyous festivity determined to put matters clearly.

"To shunt Nicko," he insisted. "We're letting her think there are to be no outsiders."

Roper hardly understood that a certain type of man needed a very gentle touch on the reins when being brought over such difficult ground. Obviously, Farncombe found some puzzling element in the project.

"Why?" came the question. "Would she very much like Captain Jeyes to be asked?".

The fussy stockbroker was becoming slightly impatient. This young gentleman was altogether too considerate of other people's feelings. Life is hard in many respects, as any man quickly discovers after a novitiate passed in the peculiar atmosphere of Capel Court.

"You don't seem to grasp the proposition," he declared. "Haven't I told you, once you're a friend of Lil's——"

The door opened, but Roper's alert eyes were on it before anyone became visible.

"Is this ma?" he cried.

Yes, it was ma, podgy and stupidly good-humored as ever—ma, attired in an expensive dress designed for a woman several inches taller and slimmer, and many years younger.

But she carried herself gayly, and tripped into the room with a pleasant smile on her contented features.

"'Ullo, uncle!" she said.

Roper greeted her with an excited flourish which conveyed at once a welcome and an indication that there was someone of consequence in the room.

"Lord Farncombe," he explained grandiloquently.

Mrs. Upjohn, who would not have been disconcerted in the least had he announced that the visitor was of royal blood, advanced and shook hands cordially.

"Glad to see you 'ere again," she chirped. "You 'ave been before, 'aven't you?"

"Last week," said Farncombe, smiling apologetically.

"Of course, of course; you came with Mr. Bertie Fulkerson. But somebody or other's always poppin' in."

Suddenly bethinking herself that she must not encourage promiscuous callers, she added:

"Lil sees too many, I say. It's tirin' for 'er. Won't you set down?"

Roper essayed valiantly to change the conversation. Mrs. Upjohn's modes of expression were altogether too candid.

"Lord Farncombe has brought Lily some flowers, ma," he said. "Where are they?"

he asked, turning with the quickness of a robin.

The young Viscount waited until Mrs. Upjohn had settled herself comfortably on the settee in front of the writing-table; then he took a chair near her, and pointed to the basket of white and pink roses.

" On the piano," he said.

Unhappily, the good lady barely glanced at the delightful bouquet.

" 'Ow kind of you! " she said. " Sech a waste o' money, too! They do go off so quick."

Roper, concealing his impatience with an ill grace, affected to read the cards attached to the various floral gifts.

" Where is Lil? " he demanded.

" She's settin' to a risin' young artist in Fitzroy Street—Claude Morgan, 'is name is," said Mrs. Upjohn, " and she won't be 'ome till past five. It's so tirin' for 'er. I don't know why——"

" Never heard of Morgan," broke in Roper.

" No, nor anybody else. That's what *I* tell 'er. Why waste your time givin' settin's to a risin' young artist when the big men 'ud go down on their 'ands and knees to do you? But that's Lil all over. She's the best-natured girl in the world, and so she gets imposed on all round."

Uncle Lal clenched his hands in sheer desperation, but Farncombe gallantly came to the rescue.

"I prophesy that Mr. Morgan's picture won't have dried before he's quite famous," he said.

The effort fell flat on the person for whom it was chiefly intended. Mrs. Upjohn turned a pair of dull eyes full upon him.

"'Ow do you mean?" she cried.

Quite disconcerted, Farncombe tried to explain.

"I—er—I mean——" he stammered.

"Why won't it 'ave dried?" inquired Mrs. Upjohn, clinging to the one fact which had penetrated her narrow intelligence.

With an effort the Guardsman pulled his wits together.

"I mean he will have become celebrated *before* it has dried," he said.

"'Is pictures never do dry, you mean?" persisted Mrs. Upjohn.

Roper was again bathed in a profuse perspiration. Really, his protégée's mother was too impossible.

"No, no, ma!" he broke in despairingly.

But Mrs. Upjohn swept aside the difficulty as immaterial.

"'Owever, it doesn't really matter," she sighed. "'E isn't even goin' to put her name to it."

"Why not?" said Roper hopelessly. He dreaded what she might say next.

" You may well ask. 'E's bent on callin' it ' The Mind the Paint Girl.' "

" But what's wrong with that? Everybody will recognize who *that* is."

" Ma " was utterly unconvinced.

" 'Er name's printed on all 'er photos," she said plaintively.

Farncombe tried his hand again. Though not widely experienced in the ways of this strange world into which he had wandered, he realized, at least, that it was highly important to win the good graces of the mother of the divinity at whose shrine he worshiped.

" Miss Parradell's nickname is well known," he said. " The first time I had the pleasure of seeing your daughter on the stage, Mrs. Upjohn, the man next to me said: ' Here comes the Mind the Paint Girl.' So the picture will possess an excellent label."

Mrs. Upjohn decided to cheer up, and look at things in the best light.

" Oh, well," she cried, " p'r'aps young Morgan knows 'is own business best. Let's 'ope so, at any rate."

Roper, who, to use one of his favorite idioms, was dancing about like a cat on hot bricks, beckoned to Farncombe.

" I want you," he said in a stage aside.

The other was mystified, but rose instantly. Excusing himself to the lady, whose contribu-

tions to the talk were so jerky and disturbing, he joined Roper. Mrs. Upjohn was conscious only of escaping from a tedious conversation. She went to the writing-table, and sat down to examine the jewelry with unconcealed delight.

"Do me a favor," whispered Roper in Farncombe's ear.

"Certainly."

The stockbroker consulted his watch.

"It is only half-past four," he said in the same subdued tone. "Take a turn round the square. I've some business to discuss with the old lady."

Farncombe nodded, and crossed the room to Mrs. Upjohn.

"I think I'll go for a little walk and come back later on, if I may," he explained smilingly.

His hostess was quite contented—ridiculously so in Roper's opinion.

"Oh, jest as you like," she said.

"I'll return in about a quarter of an hour," said Farncombe.

"If we don't see you again, I'll tell Lil you've been 'ere," she cried, still fingering the presents.

But Farncombe was not to be put off, even in this downright fashion.

"Oh, but you will," he cried—"you will see me again!"

"Well, please yourself, and you will please

your dearest friend, as Lil's dad used to say," came the parting shot from the table. The concession was not a great one, but it sufficed.

"Thank you—thank you very much," said the Viscount, and he went out, closing the door behind him. Then Mrs. Upjohn seemed to become aware of an unusual atmosphere. She turned and looked at the furious Roper.

"I b'lieve you gave that young man the 'int to go, uncle," she said.

"So I did. I told him I wanted to talk business with you." The words were blurted out with a species of repressed fury, but Mrs. Upjohn was impervious to Uncle Lal's sarcasm.

"Business," she cried indifferently, and resumed her inspection of the glittering array of trinkets on the table. She picked up one, and examined it critically.

"This *is* a 'andsome thing Mr. Grimwood sent her," she purred.

The stockbroker thrust his hands deep in his trouser-pockets, and contemplated her with an air of desperation that would have been comical in a French farce.

"Upon my soul, ma, you're a champion!" he roared.

Mrs. Upjohn understood that when a man shouted, he was annoyed, so she condescended to give her attention to whatsoever grievance Roper was harboring.

"*Now* wot 'ave I done?" she cried plaintively.

"Well, you might spread yourself a little over young Farncombe," came the angry explosion.

"Spread myself! Why should I?"

"Confound it! He's Lord Farncombe! A real live lord, ma!"

Mrs. Upjohn snapped her fingers.

"I treat 'em all alike; so does Lil," she said carelessly; "and 'e's not the first title we've 'ad 'ere, not by a dozen."

Her smug self-content got on Roper's nerves.

"No, but damn it all——" he began; then he recollected himself. "I beg your pardon," he said.

Mrs. Upjohn beamed expansively. She knew that somehow—she could not tell exactly in what way—she had put her critic out of court.

"So you ought," she said, "swearin' like a trooper!"

"But this chap's in love with her," Roper explained frenziedly.

Mrs. Upjohn giggled. She had heard that story so often.

"Oh, they're all in love with 'er, or 'ave been, one time or another."

"Yes, but they're not all Farncombes, and they're not all marrying men, and I'm pre-

pared to bet my boots that if Lil and young Farncombe could be thrown together——!"

Resolving to bring matters to an issue in so far as Lily's mother was concerned, he sat down springily on a settee, and invited her to join him.

"Here!" he said. "Do talk it over."

But Mrs. Upjohn was not to be cajoled out of her placid attitude.

"Where's the use o' talkin' it over? It's wastin' one's breath. My Lil doesn't want to marry—any'ow, not yet awhile; she's quite 'appy and contented as she is. When she does, I s'pose it'll be the Captin." She spoke with such calm acceptance of the inevitable, and smoothed out her skirt so contentedly, that Roper was stirred to real indignation.

"The Captain!" he repeated, and his utterance was not loud now, but hissing and venomous. "Ma, the day Lil marries Nicko Jeyes, you and she will see the last of *me.*" His voice rose on the concluding word with a sinister emphasis that did finally succeed in disturbing Mrs. Upjohn's equanimity.

"Oh, don't say that, uncle," she cried.

"But I do say it. The disappointment would be more than I could stand. He is a selfish, designing beggar!"

"Now, no abuse, uncle; I don't like it." That was Mrs. Upjohn's way. Whenever she

was cornered in an argument she would evade the direct issue by a remark of that kind; but Roper was not to be placated. He was determined to thrash this matter out, once and for all.

"A fellow who gets on the soft side of Lil before she is out of her teens," he cried passionately, "before she's made any position to speak of; and when she *has* made a position, and he's practically on his uppers, sticks to her like a limpet; it's sickenin'. That's what it is!"

"But she sticks to 'im, too," Mrs. Upjohn reminded him. "It meant a deal to Lil in 'er 'umble days, you must reck'lect, that she should receive attentions from a gentleman in the army. She doesn't forget that, and I don't blame her for it."

Roper was not to be pacified. Mrs. Upjohn had tacitly refused to be seated, so he jumped up from the settee and walked to and fro.

"It's cruel; that's what it is—just cruel," he muttered. "Here's Gwennie Harker and Maidie Trevail both married to peers' sons, and Eva Shafto to a baronet—all of 'em Pandora girls—and our Lil is left high and dry, engaged to a nobody! It's cruel! There's no other word for it."

"She not ackshally engaged," demurred Mrs. Upjohn.

"Um!" Roper puckered his lips disdainfully.

"The ideer was," went on the good lady, "when 'e shirked goin' to India an' gave up soldierin', so as to be near 'er, that 'e should get something to do in London; *then* they were to be engaged."

The stout stockbroker laughed sarcastically. Nature had intended him for a low comedian, and he did really look ridiculous now that he was genuinely in a rage.

"Oh, to be just, I admit he's in no hurry," he snapped. "He's been a whole year looking for something to do in London—looking for it at Catani's and at the Pandora bars."

Mrs. Upjohn was growing concerned, and tried to mollify him.

"Do be fair, Uncle Lal," she said. "'E *'as* to be on the spot at night to bring Lil 'ome after 'er work."

But she had only succeeded in providing another bone of contention.

"Exactly!" fumed Roper. "And when a decent, eligible young chap comes along and means business, he's choked off by finding Nicko Jeyes in possession." Halting suddenly before Mrs. Upjohn, he said impressively: "Now, you mark what I am telling you. Farncombe has not tumbled to it yet."

Mrs. Upjohn was becoming indifferent again. She certainly did not know what he meant.

"'Asn't he?" she said.

"No. Bertie Fulkerson has held his tongue about it; so have the other boys who are friends of Farncombe's. They see he's hard hit. Oh, they're good boys; they're good, loyal boys," and Roper's manner changed suddenly to one of supreme content. "There's not one of 'em who wouldn't throw up his hat if Nicko got the chuck."

Then he bent over her and said: "Ma!" so impressively that Mrs. Upjohn was startled.

"Hey? What is it?" she cried.

Roper sank his voice again to a fitting note of intimacy.

"You've heard about this little spree at the theater? Lil thinks it's to be merely among the members of the company."

"But ain't it?"

"No, it isn't. You keep quiet now. Not a word."

"'Oo else?" began Mrs. Upjohn.

"The boys—and Farncombe," whispered Roper dramatically.

At last his hearer's armor was pierced. This revelation disturbed her greatly.

"Gracious!" she cried. "There'll be an awful fuss with the Captin to-morrer."

"Pish!" Roper snapped his fingers, but Mrs. Upjohn was not satisfied.

"'E's so 'orribly jealous," she wailed. "When Lil tells 'im 'oo was at the party, there'll be a frightful kick-up!"

Roper knew that as well as she did, and a fit of despondency seized him momentarily.

"Oh, I dare say I'm a fool for my pains, ma," he muttered. "Nothing'll come of it. . . . Farncombe's as shy as a schoolgirl; he'd be on a desert island with a pretty woman for a month without squeezing her hand."

Curiously enough, Mrs. Upjohn was beginning to see light while Uncle Lal was becoming enveloped in gloom.

"Bear in mind," she said thoughtfully, "I shouldn't raise any objection if Lil could be weaned away from the Captin, and took a fancy to young Farncombe."

"Objection!" The little man called the gods to witness that women were an order unto themselves. Mrs. Upjohn was thinking hard now, and pursued her line with blissful heedlessness of Uncle Lal's satire.

"When all's said an' done," she communed aloud, "to be Lady F., with no need to work if you're not disposed to, is better than bein' Mrs. Captin Jeyes an' 'avin' to linger on the stige, p'r'aps till you drop, to 'elp keep the pot a-boilin' . . . Lady F.!"

Her eyes were wide open now. She was day-dreaming. Roper took heart; she had come round to the right humor at last.

"And Countess of Godalming when his father dies," he prompted her.

Mrs. Upjohn instantly looked far into the future.

"I s'pose there'd be any amount of unpleasantness with the fam'ly?" she reflected.

"The family!" Roper snorted disdainfully.

"But, there's generally a rumpus in sech cases."

Her friend was ready to deal with that objection decisively.

"Why, ma," he said, "these tip-top families ought to feel jolly grateful that we're mixing the breed for them a bit. Look at the two lads who have married Gwennie Harker and Maidie Trevail—even Eva Shafto's husband—they haven't a chin or a forehead between 'm, and their chests are as narrow as a ten-inch plank."

"Quite true," nodded Mrs. Upjohn. In her own quiet way she had noted these defects for herself.

"And Farncombe himself," continued Roper, warming to the task, "he's inclined to be weedy. I maintain it's a grand thing for our English nobs that their slips of sons have taken to marrying young women of Lil's stamp —keen-witted young women full of the joy of

life, with strong frames, beautiful hair and fine eyes, and healthy pink gums and big white teeth. They sneer at the Pandora girls! Great Scott, it's my belief that the Pandora girls 'll be the salvation of the aristocracy in this country in the long-run!"

"'Ush," murmured ma, and Captain Nicholas Jeyes lounged in.

CHAPTER VII

AN INTERLUDE

JEYES and Roper frankly disliked each other, and neither took any marked pains to conceal the fact. The army man regarded the eccentric but somewhat vulgar little stockbroker as a bounder, while Roper's opinion of Jeyes is already on record. The mere presence of "Uncle Lal" was an instant source of irritation to Jeyes, and, possibly for that very reason, he did not notice Roper's rather guilty air nor ma's propitiatory grin.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Upjohn. How'r' you, Roper?" he said, as he closed the door.

"Ah, Captin!" smirked the lady.

"Hullo, Nicko!" said Roper off-handedly.

"Lily not in?"

Jeyes came nearer. He was not so well-groomed as he used to be in the old days, but he still carried himself with an air of authority, and he permitted his eyes to rest for a contemptuous second on Roper's magnificent waistcoat.

"No," said Mrs. Upjohn. "She's in Fitzroy Street, settin' to Morgan."

" Why didn't she ask me to go with her? " frowned Jeyes.

" Dunno, I'm sure. She's took Miss Birch."

" Oh," grunted Jeyes, slightly placated. Then his glance surveyed the display of flowers.

" Um! " Evidently, he disapproved of so many admirers, whereupon Roper, to annoy him, jerked his head toward the writing-table.

" Some nice presents over there," he said.

" She's beat 'er record this year, Lil 'as, out an' out," purred Mrs. Upjohn complacently, little dreaming that she was adding fuel to the fire. Jeyes strode across the room, and scowled at the array of jewelry.

" Ve-ry nice," he muttered.

He took up one of the cases, and read the card on it, only to throw it back angrily.

" Confound 'em! " he cried. " What the devil do they take her for? "

" Allow me to remark, Jeyes, that one of those gifts is from *me,*" spluttered Roper.

" Oh, I'm not alluding to *you.*"

" Much obliged."

Jeyes disregarded Roper's fuming. He turned, and addressed Mrs. Upjohn.

" I've called in to ask Lily whether she'll come out to supper with me to-night at Catani's to celebrate her birthday. Luigi is decorating a table for me specially. Mr. and Mrs. Linthorpe will come, and Jack Wethered, and my brother,

the Rhodesian one. Are you free, Roper? I suppose it's no good asking you, Mrs. Upjohn?"

Jeyes included Roper in the invitation as he might fling a bone to a dog; but the stock-broker had found some object to interest him near the tea-table, and Mrs. Upjohn, left to her own resources, moved uneasily.

"N-no, thank you, Captin," she stammered. "An' I—I—I'm afraid Lil can't m-manage it, eether."

"Why not?"

Jeyes rapped out the obvious question in a court-martial voice.

"I—I'm surprised she didn't mention it to you 'erself when you brought 'er 'ome last night."

"Mention what?"

"They're givin' 'er a supper to-night at the theater."

"At the theater?"

Roper thought it high time to interfere. "Ma" might blurt out too much if hard pressed.

"Yes," he broke in, "Carlton is standing a little spread in the foyer in honor of the occasion. And quite right, too. Lily is *his* best asset, and chance it."

"When was this fixed up?" demanded Jeyes.

"Late last night."

Jeyes was disconcerted. He felt, perhaps, that his manner was too inquisitorial.

"The fact is," he explained hesitatingly, "I was rather quiet coming home in the car last night, and I suppose Lil kept this from me to pay me out."

Then some vague suspicion prompted him to wheel round sharply on Roper.

"Who's invited?" he asked.

"Oh—er—only the principal members of the company, I understand."

Mrs. Upjohn moistened her lips, and added, in what she deemed was a most convincing tone:

"Yes, only the members of the company, Lil says."

"With Morrie Cooling and Vincent Bland thrown in," said Roper.

Therein he went too far. Jeyes fastened on to the admission instantly.

"You seem to know a lot about it," he growled.

"Well, you see, I was behind when Morrie was goin' round to the dressing-rooms."

"Are you asked?"

"Oh—er——"

"Out with it, man. Are *you* asked?"

"Oh yes, they've dragged me into it."

"Since when have *you* been a member of the company?"

"No, but dash it all, Nicko, I've done busi-

ness for Carlton in the city for twenty years or more."

"That doesn't make you——"

"And I'm an old friend of Lil's, remember."

"You haven't known her so much longer than I. Why the blazes doesn't Carlton invite *me*?"

Roper was growing hot again. He extended his arms as though to ward off this big man towering over him.

"My dear Nicko," he cried, "*I'm* not giving the party. Really, you do jump down one's throat——"

"Sorry, sorry." Jeyes thrust his hands into his pockets and gazed blankly at the carpet. "Well, I'll put off my brother and the others. They won't want to sup with *me*. *I* shouldn't amuse 'em. . . . Her birthday, though! It will be the first time I shall have been out of that for—how many years?—six years. I——"

His outspoken reverie stopped suddenly, for he had caught the conspirators eying each other uncomfortably.

"What's up now?" he cried. "Anything the matter?"

"The matter?" repeated Roper, who was beginning to realize the anguish of a detected felon.

"Yes. Any game on at my expense?"

"Really, Captin, I dunno wot you're drivin'

at," said Mrs. Upjohn, who could not keep silent for the life of her. Jeyes was thoroughly aroused now. He knew that these two were deceiving him in some way.

" How long is Lily sitting this afternoon? " he said harshly.

" Till five," bleated Mrs. Upjohn.

He glanced at his watch.

" What's Morgan's number in Fitzroy Street? "

" Sixty."

" Then I'll fetch her."

He was making for the door when it was thrown open, and Lily entered with a rush. With her came Jimmie Birch, and the two girls looked as though they had been hurrying. Lily tore off her gloves.

" Wh-e-w, I'm dead! " she cried. " I couldn't stand the heat in the studio any longer, mother. . . . Ah, Nicko," extending a careless hand. Then discovering Roper, she offered her cheek for a kiss. *" Mon oncle! Ça va bien? "* she said, with an excellent accent.

Miss Birch closed the door.

" That young man Morgan ought to paint the infernal regions," she declared. " He'd like it."

" I wish he'd finish with the angels first," sighed Lily, taking a scarf off her shoulders. Then, thinking that she might have greeted

Jeyes rather coldly, she gave him a pleasant smile. "You in a better temper to-day, Nicko?" she asked softly.

"You drove me wild last night," he murmured close to her ear.

"Served you right," she said, making a little friendly face at him. "For goodness' sake, let me lie down," and she threw herself on a settee. "Don't come near me, any of you. Give me my fan.... Jimmie, where's my fan?"

"Oh, dear! I've left it in Fitzroy Street," said her friend.

"Beast!"

"There's one 'ere, among your presents," cried Mrs. Upjohn, going to the writing-table. Lily unpinned her hat.

"Uncle Lal, what an adorable ring that is you've sent me," she said.

"Ring! I sent you a brooch!"

"Well, *somebody* has sent me a ring."

"There's three rings," announced Mrs. Upjohn joyously.

"Of course!" said Lily. "One of them is from Nicko. . . . Did you get my sweet telegram, Nicko?"

"I had your telegram, but it is a pendant I sent you," said Jeyes sulkily, more than ever annoyed at finding himself put on the same plane as Roper.

Jimmie Birch did not help the situation by

tittering audibly, but Lily was not to be disturbed by such trifles.

"You shut up, Jimmie," she said, "how am I to remember? Who's given me this pretty thing?" she went on, looking at the fan, which she was using vigorously.

"Mr. Monty Levine," said Mrs. Upjohn.

"Bless him! He's a dear little man, though he does bite his nails."

Gladys, the parlor-maid, sailed in, followed by Vincent Bland. She did not content herself with announcing a visitor, but, seeing that her young mistress had returned, viewed her with elevated eyebrows.

"Oh, are *you* at home?" she said.

Lily returned the girl's stare rather amusedly.

"Apparently," she said.

"Then I'll whistle up to Maud," Maud being lady's-maid in the Upjohn household.

"Don't," said Lily, "if it's too severe a strain on you."

Gladys moved away majestically. Mrs. Upjohn called after her:

"We'll have tea."

The parlor-maid turned at the door.

"You can't till it's ready," she announced.

"What cheek!" said Lily calmly, as the girl went out.

Vincent Bland, a thin, delicate-looking man,

not particularly well dressed, but carrying himself with distinction, and wearing a monocle as though he were used to it, strolled across the room.

"You needn't have cut me almost on your doorstep, and why do you retain the services of that golden-haired hussy?" he said.

"Oh, she's a bit above herself, but she's a perfect servant, and I never saw you," came the convincing answer.

Bland allowed his glance to rest fixedly on Roper.

"Congratulations on your waistcoat, Lal," he said.

"Oh, I hate personalities," said Roper gruffly.

Lily held out a hand to the composer.

"Vincent," she said, "yours was one of the loveliest presents I've had to-day. *Remerciement!* How's that for an accent?"

Bland dropped his eyeglass.

"You cat!" he hissed. "You know I've given you nothing, not even a penny nosegay."

Jimmie Birch, who had been chatting with Roper, evidently had an ear for other conversation in the room, because she laughed again shrilly, and Lily raised herself on an elbow.

"On my honor, Vincent dear, I swear I thought——" she began.

"The funds are too low," said Bland, replacing the eyeglass. "I did go so far as to

price a bangle at Selby's, but that was before a certain event yesterday."

"What horses did you back, Vincent?" inquired Miss Birch. "I won a fiver through Jerry Grimwood."

Roper saw a chance to pay back Bland's reference to the waistcoat.

"You *are* a patent ass," he said loudly. "Why don't you leave betting alone?"

"Why don't you leave your City muck alone?" inquired Bland icily.

Lily stood up. She thought it high time to take more interest in life.

"Be quiet, you two!" she said imperiously. "I won't have any wrangling in my house. Run away and play, all of you. Vin, come here a minute!" She led him to a corner near the writing-table, and dropped her voice. There was no mistaking the intense feeling that vibrated in her next words.

"You have broken your word to me, then? You have been following those damned horses again?"

Bland made a wry face.

"Cooling had a tip from the stable," he murmured.

"Cooling!" she snapped. "Morrie Cooling has no children—only a fat wife. You've a darling little wife and three kiddies. How much did you drop yesterday?"

"Shan't say," declared Bland doggedly.

"Oh, Vincent!" she cried, and the tears rose unbidden to her eyes. The others in the room knew that Lily was lecturing her friend, and left them alone, but Baron von Rettenmayer entered at that moment, and marched straight up to Lily, clicking his heels as he halted in front of her, and bending like a six-foot plank controlled by a hinge in the middle.

"Aha, goddess!" he murmured. "Many habby redurns of the day!"

"H'sh!" said Lily. "I'm busy for a moment, baron. Go and talk to mother and Jimmie."

"With bleasure," said Von Rettenmayer. "How are you, my dear ma? Delided to zee you, Jimmie! My dear Rober! My dear Neegolas!"

He greeted each of them in this cheerful strain, and Jimmie Birch promptly mimicked him.

"Rober! Neegolas! Why don't they provide you with throat lozenges at the Embassy?" she cried.

Under cover of the chatter which broke out, Lily opened a drawer in the writing-table and produced a check-book. After a furtive glance over her shoulder, she swept some of the presents aside, and signed a check, which she tore out and slipped into Bland's hand.

"Now promise me," she whispered—"promise you won't make another bet this year."

Bland calmly unfolded the check and scrutinized it.

"A blank one," he said grimly.

"Put it in your pocket. Don't fill it in for more than you can help. *I'm* not over flush."

With calm deliberation he tore the check into four pieces, and, looking at her steadily, put them in his waistcoat pocket.

"I will keep these, Lil, as long as I keep anything," he said, though his voice was not so steady as his fingers.

She flushed, and flared up.

"You fool, Vincent!" she cried.

"My dear, do you think——?"

But Lily stamped her foot. She was genuinely vexed.

"Such ridiculous pride!" she flung at him. "Lord, what I owe to you! And you won't let me help you in a tight place!"

Luckily a diversion was created by the entrance of Mr. Samuel de Castro, whose spats were whiter than ever. Bland hailed him as a deliverer, and De Castro lisped his congratulations to Lily.

"Thanks, dear old boy," she said, nodding at Bland to indicate that her vengeance was

only deferred. "Did I send you a wire this morning?"

"Not you—not a thixpennorth."

"I ought to have done so, to acknowledge your—now, what was it?"

"A ring, my dear—diamondth and thapphires."

"Ah, yes—beautiful," gushed Lily, who was far too skilled an actress on the stage not to be able to act a little on her own account.

"It *ith* rather a nithe ring. But I thay, mind you don't go and tell Gabth, on any account," and De Castro's tone became confidential.

Lily raised her eyebrows with a fine assumption of ignorance.

"Gabs? Miss Kato! Why shouldn't I tell her?"

But De Castro was too old a bird to be caught in that fashion.

"Nonthenth," he said; "you know very well. You won't, will you?"

Lily shrugged her pretty shoulders. She was minded to tease him.

"I won't, if I remember not to," she said airily.

Sam became rather alarmed. Lily was no fool, he knew, but girls did stupid things occasionally.

"Ah, now, don't be thilly," he pleaded. "Whath the good o' making mithchief?"

Whereupon, it is a regrettable fact that Miss Parradell showed him the tip of her tongue. He laughed, and Von Rettenmayer's hand fell heavily on his back.

"My dear vriend Zam," he said. "Whad is de choke?"

Lily held out her hand.

"Excuse me for cutting you short when you came in, baron," she said. "Thanks for your splendid present. I did send *you* a wire, didn't I?"

Von Rettenmayer retained her hand, bowed solemnly, and kissed it.

"I shall breserve dat delegram, with oder souvenirs, till the end of my life," he vowed.

Lily withdrew her hand and blew the compliment away, but the baron had not done with her yet. After a cautious look around, he said in an altered tone:

"Goddess, aboud my drifling liddle offering: I endreat you not to mention it to Enid."

Lily burst into a hearty laugh.

"What, another of you!" she cried. Then she added seriously: "Baron, I do wish you boys wouldn't make me presents and then ask me to keep it a secret from the other girls."

"And I, on my bart, I wish it were not nezezzary, bud, goddess, you are alzo a young

lady of de vorld, and you know whad women are. De jharming Mees Mongrieff——"

Lily had seen her maid entering, so she turned away, throwing the enigmatical remark over her shoulder.

"Yes, and I know what you men are, too."

The maid, whom Gladys had presumably whistled for, rushed at Miss Parradell with a complete disregard of the assembled company.

"Here, give me your things," she said. "I was in my room having a lie down. Is my hair untidy?"

"I've never seen it anything else," said Lily, tossing her hat, scarf, and gloves to the cheerful Maud, who laughed loudly at her mistress's banter, and then hailed some of the guests.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Jimmie," she said. "Afternoon, Mr. de Castro." Turning to her mistress again, she became solicitous for her welfare.

"Now, don't you let them all tire you to death, there's a pet," she cried.

"Oh, clear out!" was the unsympathetic answer. As Maud was departing, Lily kicked off her shoes, pitching them dexterously after the girl. "Hi!" she cried. "Fetch me a pair of slippers."

Maud stopped and giggled. At that moment Gladys entered with a tea-tray, and Lord

Farncombe at her heels. The superior parlor-maid eyed her fellow-domestic scornfully, and tried to wither her on the spot.

"Oh, you're doing something, are you?" she said.

"Yes, I'm setting you an example, my girl," answered Maud. Not looking where she was going to, she cannoned against the Guardsman. "Beg pardon," she said amiably, and vanished.

Lily Parradell, though shoeless, was in no wise abashed. She tiptoed to meet Lord Farncombe and held out her hand.

"How d'ye do?" she said, smiling at him in a very friendly way. She was beginning to like this young man. He differed in many essential ways from the well-to-do idlers who frittered away the best part of their lives in attendance at the Pandora Theater. He was unassuming, diffident, yet frankly an admirer, and his attitude conveyed a grateful sense of the homage that takes no thought for rank. Any other girl in her position would have regarded him as a possible suitor, but Lily refused to look upon her men friends in that light. Still, he had touched some dormant chord in her nature. Not knowing why, she felt rather shy when speaking to him, though he himself was so bashful that Roper's description of him was by no means far-fetched.

He moved swiftly now to meet her and take the proffered hand.

"I have been here before this afternoon. I ventured to bring you some flowers," he said eagerly.

"There now," said Lily. "Nobody told me. How awfully kind of you! Where have they put them?"

He went to the piano, lifted down his basket of flowers, and showed it to her with a gentle diffidence that betrayed a lack of experience in such things.

"Here they are," he said.

"How pretty!" said Lily, pulling out a La France rose and adjusting it in her belt, knowing that she was paying a compliment to the donor. "Are you acquainted with most of the people here?"

He looked around the room.

"I know nearly everybody, I fancy," he said, nodding to Von Rettenmayer and De Castro. Then his glance fell on Jeyes, who had worked his way round to the writing-table, and was watching the two young people rather sourly, gnawing his mustache the while.

"How are you, Captain Jeyes?" said the Viscount pleasantly. "And you, Mr. Bland?" he added. He turned to Lily again. "I've been talking to Mrs. Upjohn and Mr. Roper already," he explained.

Lily introduced him to Jimmie Birch, and Farncombe gave additional proof of his lack of acquaintance with theatrical society by essaying an elaborate compliment.

"I—I need hardly say," he declared, "that I am one of Miss Birch's warmest—most profound——"

The kindly Jimmie came to the rescue.

"That's all right, Lord Farncombe," she smiled. "Don't you bother about saying nice things. You look them, and that's enough, isn't it, Lily?"

Somehow the advent of the young Viscount had created an electrical atmosphere in the room. Lily had become more gracious, and gave more heed to the niceties of speech. Mrs. Upjohn, Roper, Von Rettenmayer, even the volatile Jimmie Birch were on the *qui vive* to say and do the right thing, and Nicko Jeyes, already suspicious with regard to some of them, and resentful of the indifference with which he was treated by most of the others, became aware of a new doubt, a new anxiety, which tore him with the ever-ready claws of jealousy.

Was this handsome youngster a serious rival? He feared so. He must be on his guard, and, above all, curb that unruly tongue of his. His brother's advice came back to him. Perhaps he had chosen an unfavorable time for

urging his suit with Lily. At any rate, he could only wait and watch; but feeling himself to be little else than an outsider in this frivolous circle, he clenched his fists in sheer impotence.

CHAPTER VIII

HARMONIES, AND SOME DISCORDS

THE tousle-headed Maud came in with a pair of silk slippers, and Von Rettenmayer, who would never be anything but an overgrown boy, rushed at her and grabbed them before she was aware of his intent.

"Permid me," he said.

Maud slapped his arm as if he were an impetuous milkman. "Now, baron!" she giggled, and there was quite a little struggle between them until he ran her out of the room. Then he cried, holding the capture triumphantly aloft: "Gendlemen, led us pay homage to beaudy! Vollow me, all of you! Zam! Vinzent! Rober! Neego! Eddie! Line ub!"

Jeyes deliberately seated himself at a distance, and Farncombe, who was decidedly embarrassed, hung back, but the others obeyed joyously. Jimmie Birch clapped her hands with appreciation, and Mrs. Upjohn, who was pouring out the tea, laughed herself into a fit of coughing. Von Rettenmayer, putting a hand to his mouth, imitated a brass band with drum effects. Then, changing to the staccato com-

mands of a German drill-instructor, he shouted: "Links! Recht! Links! Recht! Quig marge!" and headed the procession round the room.

"Baron, you great baby!" cried Lily, blushing scarlet at the mock ceremony proposed in her honor.

Roper, seeing that the young Viscount was not in the cue, cried gleefully: "Come along, Farncombe!" and Miss Birch encouraged him with a dig in the ribs. Whereupon he, too, joined in the revel.

Von Rettenmayer, thoroughly in his element when engaged in this sort of nonsense, waved the slippers in air, and began to sing, in a rich, full baritone:

"Weib, was ist in aller Welt,
Dir an Schönheit gleichgestellt!
Reizumflossen, wunderhold,
Perl' der Schöpfung, Herzengold!
Tag's Gedanken, Traum der Nacht,
Schweben um Dich, Süsse, sacht.

Venus, seinen Macken beut
Dir Dein Sklave, dienstbereit!"*

*The following is a free translation:

"Woman, earth holds naught more dear,
You alone can be your peer.
Charming, graceful in full measure,
Rarest pearl, heart's fondest treasure!
My waking thoughts, my dreams by night,
Hover round you, vision bright!

Venus!—bid me but to stay
Your slave for ever and a day."

He timed the promenade so adroitly that, when the end of his song was reached, he was on one knee before Lily. She, entering laughingly into the frolic, extended her left foot, and he kissed her instep before adjusting the slipper, being rewarded with a light box on the ears. He made way for De Castro, handing him the remaining slipper, and the literary celebrity performed the same rite with much *empressement,* whereupon Lily dexterously upset his balance. Bland and Roper perforce contented themselves by kissing her instep, but, when the girl found Farncombe looking at her hesitatingly, she raised her eyes to his in a distinctly self-conscious way, and withdrew her foot.

" No, no," she murmured, shaking her head decisively, " don't you be silly like the others."

" Tea! " cried Mrs. Upjohn loudly.

" Ma " might be tactless enough in speech, but, being a woman, she had a sharp eye where flirtation was concerned. Moreover, she was rather alarmed by the attitude Jeyes had seen fit to adopt, and her timely interruption scattered the group of laughing men. Gladys had brought in a stand containing cakes and other delicacies, and Roper seized it, strutting around the room and mimicking the voice of a theater attendant.

"Ices," he chanted, "sweets or chocolates, corfee, an' full pianner-score of the op'ra!"

But Mrs. Upjohn was still watching Jeyes furtively.

"Captin," she said, "ain't you goin' to 'ave any tea?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Upjohn," he replied, affecting to examine some present which was claiming his attention. Lily, blissfully unaware of this morose attitude on Jeyes's part, made room for Farncombe by her side on the settee.

"You have seen our show at the Pandora a good many times?" she said, smiling at him.

"Twenty-three," he replied instantly.

"Not really?" and her eyebrows arched with astonishment.

"Yes, I haven't missed a night this week and last."

There was no mistaking the admiration in his eyes, so she turned lightly to a new topic.

"You are in the Guards, are you not?" she asked.

"Yes, the Grenadiers."

"Ah," she said smilingly, "you'll never do a braver deed than enduring our antics at the Pandora twenty-three times."

"Oh, I like you better every time I see you, Miss Parradell," he ventured to say.

"Good gracious! I had no idea I was so versatile!" she cried.

"But—er—I do not mean in the character you assume on the stage. I go to the Pandora only to watch you. I fancy, somehow, that you're just yourself when you are singing and dancing. There's no make-believe about you. I—I'm a bad hand at explaining myself—but——"

He halted confusedly, and Lily was aware that she, too, felt absurdly tongue-tied. Miss Birch suddenly choked. Her mouth was full of cake, and she was trying to laugh.

"Boys!" she cried, appealing with a gesture for time to regain her breath, "wait a minute. . . . I've swallowed some of the baron's German. . . . There, it's gone down with a large raisin! But, honestly, boys—no rot! I want to propose a toast," and she raised her teacup. "Here's a jolly good health to Lily! She's a white woman, Lily is—the stanchest, truest pal, where she takes a liking——"

Jimmie's voice failed her again, though not because of cake on this occasion, and Mrs. Upjohn, unexpectedly yielding to emotion, rose and embraced her daughter.

"And the best girl breathin'," she cried tremulously. "'Ave any of you noticed the dress I'm wearin' this afternoon? Fifteen guineas it's cost 'er. Madame Godolphin made it, an' a 'at to go with it, *ong sweet.*"

The good lady, deaf to Lily's plaintive

"Hu-s-s-sh! Mother!" paraded before them, showing off the points of her gown; but Jimmie Birch came to the rescue by lifting her tea-cup again.

"Here's to Lily—in a cup of tea!" she cried.

The toast was honored with enthusiasm, and Lily murmured brokenly that she thanked them from the bottom of her heart. Jimmie Birch, however, was strung up to an intense pitch of excitement, and meant to have her say, willy-nilly.

"By Jove!" she went on, "Lil saved me once from going home to a cheap lodging and taking a dose of rat-killer!"

"A pidy—a grade pidy," murmured Von Rettenmayer, taking care to be well out of range.

"I'll attend to you presently, baron," said Miss Birch. "But listen, all of you. It was my first morning at the Pandora. They'd had me up from Harrogate in a hurry, to take Gwennie Harker's place. I'd been playing her part in the Number Two Company in the country; and she'd left 'em in a hole, to get married to a stupid lord——" She broke off to smile sweetly at Farncombe. "Sorry!" she cried; "I forgot you were one—a lord, I mean. . . . I was only to have one rehearsal, and, oh, didn't they treat me abominably! Eva Shafto was

late, and we were all hanging about on the stage waiting for her. I've never felt so cold in my life, nor so lonely. Not a word of welcome, not a nod, from a single soul; simply a blank stare occasionally from a haughty beauty with a curled lip! And at last, when I was on the point of howling, I became conscious that somebody was watching me, a tall, pretty thing in a lavender frock. I caught her eye, and she came straight over and sat down beside me. ' Shaky? ' she said. ' A corpse,' said I. And she quietly took my hand and held it till Eva Shafto condescended to stroll in. When I got up I asked her who she was. ' Oh, my God,' I said, ' I'll never forget your kindness! Why, of course, you're the ' Mind the Paint ' girl——"

The tremulous little speech might almost have been a stage cue. Roper, De Castro, and Von Rettenmayer instantly began singing the famous chorus, and Vincent Bland rushed to the piano and thumped out the air. There were tears in Lily's eyes, for she knew just how her friend had felt on that miserable morning, but, almost unconsciously, her body began to sway to the rhythm of the tune.

" Sing it for us, Lil, won't you? " pleaded Roper.

She stood up, pressing her hands to her temples.

"Oh, I couldn't—it's gone!" she cried; but Bland, understanding the soul of the artist, played the introductory symphony, and waited. Silently some of the men moved chairs and tables out of the way, and Lily began to sing:

"I've a very charming dwelling
(You know where without the telling),
Decorated in a style that's rather quaint!
Smart and quaint!
When you pay the house a visit,
You may scrutinize or quiz it,
But you mustn't touch the paint!
Brand new paint!

"Mind the paint! Mind the paint!
(No matter whether Maple's bills are settled or they ain't)
Once you smear it, or you scratch it,
It's impossible to match it;
So take care, please, of the paint—of the paint!"

The piano dashed off into a dance movement, and the girl, yielding to the subtle call of the music, danced a few steps most gracefully, while Jimmie Birch promptly marshaled her three supporters as a chorus, and thereby added an impromptu stage setting that was very effective. Again the piano halted expectantly, and Lily sang the second verse:

"I'm possessed of all the graces;
Oh, a perfect dr-r-r-ream my face is!
(It may owe to Art a trifle or it mayn't!
H'm, it mayn't!)

And I'll cry out for assistance
Should you fail to keep your distance.
Goodness gracious, mind the paint!
Mind the paint!

"Mind the paint! Mind the paint!
A girl is not a sinner just because she's not a saint!
But my heart shall hold you dearer;
You may come a little nearer
If you'll only mind the paint—mind the paint!"

This time Mrs. Upjohn sang and postured with the others. Bland was in the humor to carry the girl through the whole of the song, but Lily flung herself on to a settee, and laughingly held up her hands in protest.

"No more if you love me," she cried. "No, not another word. I've had such a stiff day——"

Whereupon ma recollected her guardian rôle, and assumed it with sudden energy.

"Out you go, all of you. Out you go!" she cried.

"Come on," said Miss Birch, shaking hands with Farncombe. "Let's mizzle; it's cruel of us to tire her so."

Mrs. Upjohn tapped Von Rettenmayer familiarly on the shoulder, with an emphatic "Now then, baron!" He bowed profoundly.

"I'm goming," he said.

"Well, *gome,*" tittered Jimmie Birch, and pulled him away.

Still Mrs. Upjohn maintained her dragon-like attitude.

"You, too, Mr. De Castro," she cried, catching Sam's eye. "'Owever d'ye think she's goin' to get through her work to-night?"

De Castro was rather breathless after his recent exertions.

"Quite right, ma," he agreed, "ethpethally with a thupper and a danthe afterwardth."

Roper turned on him as a terrier might dash after a rabbit.

"You damned fool!" he breathed.

De Castro clapped his hand to his mouth. "Oh!" he muttered; nor did he mend matters in the slightest degree by glancing at Jeyes, who had heard what he said, and now strode forward ponderously.

"Good-by, Nicko," said Roper uneasily, and De Castro's farewell was equally flurried.

"Good-by," said Jeyes dryly, with a look that spoke volumes. Bland, talking to Lily, was blissfully unaware of De Castro's slip.

"Ah, that jingle!" he said pensively. "An echo of old times, eh?"

"Yes, but not better times than these, Vin?" she murmured affectionately.

He fondled her hand for a moment.

"No, Lil, there are so many tunes left for *you* in life, my dear!"—and the monocle lost all its cynicism for the moment. She would

have made some impulsive reply, but Viscount Farncombe had come to bid her farewell.

"Thank you—thank you very much," he said fervently. "It was glorious!"

"I really ought to be ashamed of myself," she said, seized with sudden timidity, "but I was carried away when I heard Vincent strumming the piano. It reminded me of the first time we rehearsed that song together."

"Oh, but I mean every word I said," protested Farncombe.

"T'sh," she cried lightly. "See you again soon, perhaps?"

"Yes, yes, of course——"

Roper, alert now to stop any further disclosures, called to him. The young man looked round the room and saw that Nicko was standing near the entrance to the conservatory.

"Good-by, Captain Jeyes," he cried agreeably.

The other turned on hearing the voice.

"Good-by," he nodded, with a quiet smile.

Farncombe shook hands with Mrs. Upjohn.

"I've had a delightful afternoon," he said. "Really, I've enjoyed myself amazingly."

"Oh, we're always glad when a few folks pop in," said ma, though she slightly spoiled the effect of a gracious remark by adding: "if they don't overstay their welcome."

"Naturally. Good-by." And Farncombe vanished hurriedly.

Mrs. Upjohn meant to clear everybody out.

"You, too, Captin," she said, waiting at the door.

"In one minute," he said. "I want just half-a-dozen words with Lily."

"Now, you won't keep her longer," persisted ma, feeling that she was doing her best on behalf of the conspiracy.

"No, no," said Jeyes grimly. "I know she won't be home till four o'clock to-morrow morning at the earliest."

Mrs. Upjohn was vanquished, and went out.

"So Smythe is giving you a grand feed to-night at the theater, I hear," he said, watching Lily rearranging various cushions in a housewifely way.

"Yes, in the foyer," she replied.

"And a dance, it appears."

She yawned unaffectedly. It was quite clear that the matter held small interest for her.

"Who told you, grumpy?" she demanded.

"Roper and your mother told me about the supper. *You* didn't."

"Well, Nicko, you were in such a vile mood last night coming home."

"Who will you dance with to-night?" he asked.

She glanced round at him rather more alertly. Obviously she wondered what was troubling him.

"Members of the company, of course," she said.

"That doesn't sound very inspiring."

"Rather school-treaty, isn't it?"—this by way of comment while patting a refractory cushion.

"Nobody from outside?" he went on.

"N-no; it's only the men in the theater and the principal ladies."

"Roper's going," said Jeyes.

"Well, Nicko, Lal's hardly from outside."

"And De Castro."

"Sam? Is he really?"

"I'm sure of it—from something I heard him saying just now."

Lily weighed the point judicially for a second.

"Sam used to finance Carlton. I suppose they reckon him one of us."

Jeyes plunged his hands into his coat-pockets. It was his characteristic gesture when beginning to feel annoyed.

"Smythe might have extended the compliment to me," he said. "He knows how I stand towards you."

"I'm awfully sorry; I can't help it," she protested.

"But, don't you see, if Roper and De Castro are asked there may be others."

"Oh dear!" she sighed, obviously weary of a trivial discussion, and wholly unaware that Nicko's jaws were set in a scowl.

"Some of the more juvenile 'boys,' perhaps," he muttered. "I say, Lil, when did you make the acquaintance of the young sprig of nobility who has been here this afternoon?"

The girl appeared then to wake up to the fact that there was more in this casual chat than met the eye.

"Lord Farncombe?" she said quietly. "Bertie Fulkerson introduced him to me one day not so long ago."

"So, *he's* at your feet now," came the angry comment.

"Pooh!" cried Lily, turning away disdainfully.

"Oh, you may say 'Pooh' as often as you like. He's in front every blessed night. There he sits, Row B, three stalls from the end, prompt side."

"You're too entertaining for words. Surely there are a few good-looking girls at the Pandora besides your humble servant!"

She was facing him now, and rather inclined to be vexed. A "scene" was the last thing she had anticipated when he remained in the room after the others had gone.

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed. "His glass follows you all over the stage. He's infatuated. I watched him talking to you just now——"

"Did you, indeed!" Her contemptuous tone stirred him to more outspoken anger, and his clenched hands beat on the back of his chair.

"God in heaven!" he cried. "First it's one, and then it's another. All of 'em chasing you, and I'm powerless."

"Oh, you're maddening, Nicko," she said despairingly; "you are positively maddening! The other night it was Stewie Heneage you chose to be jealous of, simply because you'd heard him sounding my praises at Catani's. You went on so that you almost broke the windows of the car."

"I confess I object to Heneage, or any man, raving about you at the top of his voice in a public place." Jeyes was inclined to be pompous at such moments, and thus unfortunately dissipated the very atmosphere he was striving to create.

"Snakes alive!" she cried, "why shouldn't Stewie rave about me in a public place, if he feels like it? I belong to the public. He might rave about a girl who's a jolly sight less deserving of it, as a girl *and* an artist, than I am."

"Well," he allowed, "we'll dismiss Heneage."

She saw her advantage, and pressed it to the uttermost.

"Yes, exit Stewie, and enter somebody else for you to fuss and fume about. This afternoon it's Lord Farncombe, and to-morrow it'll be Lord Tom Noddy, and next day the Marquis Graball. One would think, to hear you, that I don't know how to take care of myself, or to deal with any poor boy who loses his head over me! You're growing worse and worse with your jealousy, Nicko. Stop it! I'm surprised at you after all these years. It's beginning to fret me, and that's bad for my spirits and bad for me in business."

She had wandered to the tea-table, and thoughtlessly picked up a piece of bread and butter, which she began to eat. "And now you're making me spoil my dinner," she added, though not without a touch of humorous dismay in her voice, "and you know that's not good for me either, you brute!"

Jeyes sat down heavily. His hands hung loosely between his knees, and he muttered, with an air of utter dejection:

"Oh, Lily, Lily!"

"Yes, oh, Lily, Lily!" she mimicked him.

"Why don't you put me out of my misery?" he said, blurting out the first haphazard words that shaped themselves in his disturbed mind.

" Poison you! " she enquired, munching the bread and butter.

" Marry me! "

There, he had done it, and was at once miserably conscious of having burlesqued the passion that was consuming him.

" Marry you? " she repeated, with unfeigned wonder, still not taking him seriously. Creeping behind his chair, she drew a pocket-handkerchief from his breast-pocket and wiped her fingers daintily. " Have you come to tell me you've got some work to do at last? " she went on, cruel in her heedless sarcasm. " Break the news gently, Nicko; the shock might be too great for me."

" Oh, I'd find a billet soon enough, Lil, if only I had an incentive to hunt for it," he urged brokenly.

" Incentive! How long is it since I was willing to engage myself to you absolutely if you could obtain a good secretaryship, or something of the sort? "

Three thousand a year! The folly of it! She little dreamed how that unctuous phrase was drumming in his ears. But he was moved to defend himself—Jeyes might always be depended on to find a convincing excuse for himself.

" I—I've no fancy for a beggarly secretaryship," he grunted.

She was seized then with an unreasoning anger against him. Why should he—why should any man—think he had a right to spoil a pleasant afternoon in this fashion? She threw the handkerchief to him, and turned away.

"No," she said mercilessly. "All *you* have a fancy for, seemingly, is to loaf about London and worry your unfortunate people. How a man of your age can rest satisfied with your present position passes my dull comprehension."

"I—I *have* been a bit slack," he owned. "I *have* been a bit leisurely; but now——"

He looked up, and fancied, which was true, that she was hardly listening. She had gone to the piano, and was inhaling the fragrance of the roses Farncombe had sent her. The sense of contrast between the two men was assuredly accountable for the bitter words she flung at Jeyes now.

"Nicko," she said, "that pendant, or whatever it is, you've given me—I don't want to hurt you, but I won't accept it. Please take it away with you, do you hear?"

"Lil!" he muttered.

"I'm in earnest, horribly in earnest; you remove it off my premises."

The very sound of her voice giving a ruthless command in that precise way startled her. She

relented instantly, and stole a little nearer to the stricken man in the chair. He felt that her stormy mood was yielding, and lifted his head again.

"My eldest brother, Bob," he said, "has been at me to go to Rhodesia. He wants me to manage a group of stock farms he's interested in near Buluwayo."

"First-rate. And why don't you go?"

The innocent question cut deeper than she intended.

"Rhodesia! Buluwayo!" he said with a dismal smile. "Will you come with me?"

"Nicko, don't be absurd."

The mere suggestion seemed to alarm her, and Jeyes, who was no weakling, sprang up and put his hands on her shoulders, exactly as he had done on that memorable day, now so long ago, when first he asked her to marry him.

"You wouldn't care a straw—not a brass farthing—if I did go, would you, Lil?" he asked.

She had discussed some such problem with him many times, but his evident suffering softened her.

"Stuff!" she said, toying with a button of his waistcoat, "I should miss you horribly. . . . Who'd bring me home at night then, and take me anywhere I want to go?"

"Ah, who? Who?"

His grip tightened, and she winced.

"Don't!" she cried. "You'll bruise my skin if you're not careful."

He took one of her hands and stroked it gently.

"Well, it might be that you'd miss me for a while," he said, "—miss the old dog you're accustomed to find lying on your doormat. But you don't love me, Lil—not even as much or as little as you did a year ago. You don't *love* me!"

She had never seen him in quite such a saddened mood, but she answered candidly, with a faint shrug of her shoulders:

"Perhaps I don't in the way you mean. . . . Perhaps it's not in me to love anybody in a marrying way."

Suddenly their eyes met, and her speech faltered.

"Still, as you say——" she began.

"As I say?" he cried, and hope glimmered within him.

"The fact is, I'm *accustomed* to you, Nicko."

It dawned on him that this was a moment fraught with potentialities—alas! he had been vouchsafed many, only to spurn them—and he endeavored to draw her close in his arms. But she wriggled free, and, with the self-possessed laugh of a woman who did not know what love

meant, put a playful finger on the crown of her head.

"There—you may there!" she cried, stooping while he kissed her hair. "Now I must run upstairs, or mother will whack me."

Still he hungered for her, and would not release her.

"Won't you allow me to fetch you after the dance?" he said.

"At three or four in the morning! No, dear boy, I'll give you a rest. Uncle Lal or Sam will take on your job. . . . And don't try to see me to-morrow."

"Why not?" he demanded sharply, ready as ever to probe, to suspect.

"Not till you turn up at night as usual, I mean," she explained mischievously. "I shall be a shocking rag all day."

"Yes," he thundered, with an ungovernable access of fury, "I expect you'll manage to enjoy yourself thoroughly, and dance yourself off your feet, whoever your partners may be."

She tossed her head willfully.

"I expect I shall," she laughed. "Ha, ha! I'll certainly do my best."

And with that she was gone, blissfully ignorant of the fact that this parting shot was destined to fire a mine which would explode at her very feet; for in ordinary circumstances Jeyes would not have stooped to any form of

deceit or subterfuge, even to counteract the plans of others deterred by no such scruples. But he was aflame with resentment against Roper and De Castro, and quivering with a sense of abject failure in the undertaking on which he had built so hopefully. He strode resolutely to the telephone on the writing-table, and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Gerrard, 3848," he said.

While waiting for a response, he saw that Lily had left the door wide open. With a certain furtiveness that seemed oddly out of place in one of his stalwart frame, he laid down the receiver, crept to the door, and closed it. Then he hurried back to the telephone.

"That the Pandora Theater? " he asked.

Changing his voice with an expertness which would indubitably have amused and surprised Lily if she had heard, he imitated De Castro's lisp.

"Ith Mithter Morrith Cooling in? . . . I'm Mithter de Castro. . . . Tham de Castro. . . . Gone, ith he? . . . Oh, ith that you, Mr. Hickthon? . . . Yeth, you'll do. . . . About the thupper-party to-night that Mithter Smythe ith giving to Mith Parradell. . . . I didn't quite understand whether itth to be at the theater or at a rethaurong. . . . At the theater? . . . Oh, yeth. . . . A largth party? . . . Oh, that *ith* nithe. . . . Who are the guesth—d'ye know?

. . . Yeth? . . . Yeth? . . . Oh, an' the boyth! . . . Oh, thome o' the *boyth* are comin', are they! . . . Eh? . . . You haven't got the litht from Mithter Roper yet? . . . Oh, he'th been helpin' to get it up! . . . Then we *shall* have a splendid time! . . . The boyth! . . . Yeth! . . . Yeth! ha, ha, ha, ha! . . . Thankth. . . . Good-by."

Replacing the receiver, he walked slowly out, with bent head and hands clasped behind his back, and the expression of his face was that of a man who had plumbed the depths of despair.

CHAPTER IX

FRIVOLITIES

THERE was no rest for Lily Parradell that afternoon. The unusual attitude Jeyes had seen fit to adopt had frightened and distressed her a good deal more than he had any inkling of. She felt, too, in an uncanny way, that some new influence had come into her life. It seemed as if she had suddenly grown older. This was her twenty-third birthday; to-morrow her age would be twenty-three years and one day; already she was in her twenty-fourth year! Twenty-four!—she was counting in that lachrymose fashion—why, at that age, most of the nice girls she knew were either married, or thinking seriously of matrimony. Was she an exception to the rule? Or was it really true that she was destined to marry Nicko Jeyes? Did she want to marry him? Come, now, answer that question honestly! Well, if it must be answered—no, a thousand times *no!*

Did she want to marry anybody? No, not yet. But, when the time came that she must de-

cide, once and for all, the gravest problem that can present itself to a woman, what sort of a man would she select as a husband? Again the image of Nicko Jeyes became insistent, and tears rose unbidden to her eyes when she discovered, almost with fear, that she could not endure the prospect of sharing the intimacy of married life with Nicko.

With whom, then? She was acquainted with dozens of eligible young men, some among them only too ready to respond to the slightest sign of her favor, but was there one to whom she could go with that perfect trust and confidence which a wife should place in her husband? Well, perhaps there *was* one—a man whose adoring glance had never appraised her good looks with that bold scrutiny of the restaurant and the street which had often brought an angry flush to her brows and a steely light to her blue eyes.

But, heavens above! what would Nicko say? Had she really plighted her word to him? She shivered a little at the thought, though instantly came the assurance that she had been perfectly fair with him. They might have been married years ago had he so willed. But he did not. She understood now that he had refused deliberately to entertain the notion of marriage at a time when she would have gone to him gratefully, if not with that abandon-

ment of passion to which some women yielded, even if she herself had not fallen a victim to it—yet.

And so it came to pass that her maid found her lying in her bedroom, gazing wide-eyed at the ceiling, when she ought to have been dozing comfortably.

"What! Ain't you asleep?" demanded the sympathetic Maud. "My! If Mrs. Upjohn knew she *would* go on."

"Then don't tell her," said Lily crossly.

"Shan't," declared the untidy one. "What dress will you wear to-night?"

"My old green."

"But I mean for the dance."

"Oh, anything will do."

"Indeed, it won't. And on your birthday, too, with no end of a fine spread in your honor! I'll pack your white satin, and please tell that dresser at the theater that if she——"

"Will you hold your tongue?" broke in Lily.

During a few minutes there was silence, in the matter of speech only, since Maud was clattering the doors of wardrobes, and causing a dress-basket to squeak in torture.

"Maud!" cried Lily suddenly.

"Yes, miss." At any other time Maud would have said, "Yes, dear," but she had been

momentarily quelled by some new quality in her mistress's voice.

"Just run round to the florist's in Tottenham Court Road with the basket of white and pink roses you will find on the piano—it has Lord Farncombe's card on it—and ask the dear man to oblige me by making it into a bouquet. I shall have plenty of flowers given me to-night, I have no doubt, but I fancy those roses."

"Oh, his lordship *will* be pleased; and Gladys says he is such a nice young gentleman," cried the maid.

"As it happens, his lordship will know nothing whatever about it. He won't be there. . . . Can't I have a bouquet made up to my liking without being cross-examined as to the why and the wherefore?"

"Sorry!" said Maud. "I'll go this minnit. Now, lie still, there's a dear. You have plenty of time, an' your dress is all ready. You will look a picture to-night. It's such a pity Lord Farncombe can't see you——"

Lily dawdled in her room till the last moment possible, because she dreaded her mother's questioning, especially when "ma" set eyes on the dismantled basket and learnt its reason. She could not guess that Mrs. Upjohn, uneasy in mind because of the plot to oust Jeyes from the party, was secretly anxious to avoid uttering a word about it. "Least said, soonest

mended," was one of the late lamented Upjohn's pet aphorisms; consequently, if "the Captin" made a row to-morrow on account of his exclusion, "ma" wished to have Lily, at least, as a witness that the matter was never discussed between them.

So they kissed and parted without any reference to the bouquet, but Maud had confided to Mrs. Upjohn full details of the visit to the florist's long before Lily's car had reached the theater.

Luigi, the presiding genius at Catani's, had given the best of his unrivaled skill to the preparations for the night's amusement. Helped by several trained waiters and a small army of stage hands pressed into service for the hour, he converted the foyer of the theater into a sumptuous supper-room. Within a few minutes after the last play-goer had quitted the dress circle, the spacious refreshment-room was swept and garnished with additional furniture, hangings, and flowers. Four round tables were laid for a supper-party of twenty-six, and the bar-counter was converted into a sumptuous sideboard. Luigi himself, a little, dark, active man, seemed to be everywhere at once, and his deft-handed myrmidons were working like navvies when Maurice Cooling, the Pandora's business manager and general factotum, strolled in after casting up the night's ac-

counts. He was obviously surprised by the metamorphosis already effected.

It is an unwritten law in the theatrical world that its Coolings shall be of imposing presence; they are never seen except in immaculate evening dress; they wear the shiniest of silk hats, and display vast expanses of shirt-front. This particular representative of the tribe in no wise departed from its traditions, either in manner or appearance. He was tall and portly, and bent over the diminutive Italian with a ponderous air of approval.

"By Jove, Luigi," he said, "you have soon made a change here! Evidently you study stage settings in your profession the same as we do. Let me see now, I have a plan of the tables somewhere, and cards with the guests' names on 'em. Ah, here we are!" and he produced the exhibits from a pocket. "Shall I interfere with your arrangements if I go round and allot the various people's seats?"

"Not in the least, sir. Everything is ready. I hope you think the tables look nice."

While speaking, Luigi made some cabalistic signs with his hands, and every waiter disappeared as though by magic.

"Not bad," said Cooling, absorbed in the work of sorting out the cards, "not half bad. Now I mustn't mix things. . . . Colonel Stidulph and Miss Connify—where are you,

Miss Connify? Oh, there you are, my dear," and he stooped across one of the tables.

Luigi smiled. He would have sorted out the cards with the dexterity of a conjurer, but, leaving Cooling to the task, he, too, vanished. Roper bustled in from an outer landing.

"Hullo, Morrie!" he cried, cutting a caper. "A merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and how are you to-morrow?"

"Hullo, Lal," said Cooling, deep in his study of the plan, and searching seriously for another card. He frowned, and seemed inclined to abandon the job for a moment, but apparently made up his mind to go on with it.

Roper surveyed the spread with marked approval. He pranced from one table to another, and found everything perfect.

"Splendid!" he cried. "Seating 'em, eh? Which d'ye make your principal table?"

"This is it; you're at it now," said Cooling testily. Being a big, slow-thinking man, he disliked disturbing influences when occupied in such an arduous duty as the present one. Roper bent and examined some of the cards already placed on the serviettes.

"Miss Lily Parradell," he read, and his jaw fell. "Why have you gone and put the baron on her right?"

"Well, what's the objection?" demanded Cooling.

"But where's Farncombe? Where the deuce have you put Lord Farncombe?"

"On the other side—with Dolly Stidulph and Enid."

"Oh, rats!"

Cooling was nettled and grieved. To think that he had taken the trouble——

"Look here, Lal," he growled. "What do you mean by 'rats'? And why do you come bothering about when one is busy?"

"But, my dear fellow, Miss Parradell is the heroine o' the party. The seat next to her is the seat of honor."

"Exactly so, and that's why I've put the baron there. Isn't he a distinguished foreigner? And with things as they are between England and Germany——"

"Oh, blow Germany! If Germany doesn't like it, she must lump it. Lord Farncombe's the eldest son of an Earl; you can't get over that. Besides, the baron is sweet on Enid just now. I'm sure he'd prefer——"

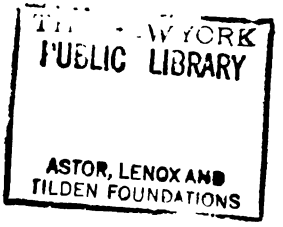
Cooling sorted out a card ungraciously.

"Oh, have it your own way!" he said.

"Thanks, old man. Sorry I was shirty," muttered Roper.

But the bulky manager of the Pandora harbored another grievance against his interfering friend, who must be crushed forthwith, or the tables would never be arranged in time. He

LILY DECLINES VISCOUNT FARNCOMBE'S PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE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laid down the plan and cards, and extracted a letter from his waistcoat pocket.

"By-the-by, Lal," he said, adjusting a pair of pince-nez, "the fair Lily—the heroine of the party, as you call her—is in a pretty tantrum over the whole business. Somebody has gone and mixed things nicely. It isn't *my* fault."

"What's up now?" demanded Roper, craning his neck to peer at the letter which Cooling was unfolding.

"Listen, my boy. I had this from her ten minutes ago. It is headed, 'My dressing-room, 11.15; 80 degrees with the windows open.' I should think so, indeed! If the thermometer registered her temperature, it must have been nearer 160!"

"My eye, what's wrong?" cried Roper, though his heart misgave him, for he guessed what was coming.

"You'll soon know," and the big man began to read: "'Morrie, you pig!'"—whereupon Roper whistled—"'Morrie, you pig! I should feel deeply indebted to you if you would kindly inform me why the devil you went out of your way to deceive me last night. You led me to suppose, and so did that lying worm, Lal Roper——'" Cooling paused impressively, and glanced at the stockbroker over the rims of his glasses.

"D'ye hear? that's you," he said.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Roper.

Cooling resumed his reading, mouthing each word with much gusto: "'That lying worm, Lal Roper——'"

Uncle Lal bridled and flushed.

"All right," he said stiffly, "you needn't rub it in; she means me right enough."

His friend, satisfied with the point scored, took up the thread of the letter again:

"'You both led me to suppose that this rotten banquet was to be a family gathering of the ladies and gentlemen of the Pandora Theater, and no outsiders asked. Now I find that only three or four men of the company are invited, and I hear from Nita Trevenna that several of the boys are to be laid on for the occasion. The result is you have made me tell a regular whopper to a particular friend of mine with regard to this affair——'"

"Oh, crikey—Nicko Jeyes!" breathed Roper.

"'——which I will never forgive you for,'" read Cooling, "'neither you nor Lal Roper. As true as I am alive I have a jolly good mind not to show up, but to put on my old rags and go straight home. You are two cads. So take it out of that, and believe me always yours affectionately, Lil.'"

Roper began to hop about the room. Remain

still he could not, for speech invariably galvanized him into action.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he groaned, realizing that if there was one thing worse than having Lily's opinion read to him, it was to receive it from the lady herself when next they met.

Cooling returned the letter to his pocket.

"It's a tasty document, isn't it?" he said, thoroughly gratified at sight of Roper's distress.

"A lying worm and a cad!" gurgled the little man, "and from Miss Lily Margaret Upjohn! Now, who'd have thought it. . . . Have you done anything about it?"

"No, I waited for you. You are responsible. What I did last night was simply to oblige a pal."

"I had better run round to her dressing-room and try to smooth her down, hadn't I?" said Roper irresolutely.

Cooling went on ostentatiously sorting out cards.

"Perhaps you had," he said. Then he added, apparently as an afterthought: "Why you wanted to mislead the girl I can't for the life of me understand."

Roper flared up instantly. It was bad enough to have ugly things written about him by Lily Parradell, but he considered it the height of ingratitude on Cooling's part to reproach him

with a mismanaged scheme in which they had shared equally.

"Damn it all!" he cried. "You agreed that that sulky brute Jeyes would be what the baron calls him, a wet blanket. You blow hot and cold, you do, and what's more, I didn't notice that Lily omitted your name from her choice communication."

"There you go; more filthy temper," said Cooling calmly.

"If ever I assist in getting up another party—" began Roper in a rage, but he checked the outburst when Carlton Smythe entered. Instantly he was all smiles, and tragedy gave place to low comedy in his manner.

"Hullo, Carlton," he cried. "Here we are again! All change for Oxford Circus!"

"Ha, Lal," said Smythe. "Helping to titivate the place, I see. Where are you off to?" because Roper was making for the door.

"I want to have a word with Lily Parradell," and the stockbroker fled. He had no desire whatever to let Smythe into the secret of Lily's annoyance, because the proprietor of the Pandora might have disapproved strongly of any discrimination being exercised against the leading lady's friends without her knowledge.

"How are you to-night, chief?" said Cooling, fumbling in a pocket, and producing a long

slip of paper. "What d'ye think of that for to-night's house, and the weather dead against us?"

Smythe smiled his approval of the figures.

"Capital!" he said. "But there's no bad weather for a good play. I'll go and have a wash and brush up."

He turned to the door, but should have made his escape a moment earlier, because a number of men whom he was compelled to greet affably sauntered in. He had just got clear of them when De Castro appeared and button-holed him promptly.

"I thay, Carlton," whispered the newcomer mysteriously. "I have been in front again to-night. Itth magnifithenth—marvelouth!"

Smythe gazed resignedly at the convertible diamond stud blazing in De Castro's shirt.

"It'll do," he agreed. "I shall get a couple of years out of it. I just want a wash and brush——"

But De Castro held him firmly.

"There'th only one little improvement I'd like to thee—if I may thuggeth it?"

"What's that?"

Keeping hold of Smythe's coat until he had linked an arm, De Castro sank his voice even lower.

"You're thure you won't conthider me prethumpthuoth?"

"My dear fellow, of course not. It's very kind of you."

De Castro brought his mouth as close as possible to Smythe's ear, standing on tiptoe for the purpose.

"If you could give Gabth, Miss Kato, a tiny bit more to do in the second act," he confided.

"Ah, yes, yes," nodded Carlton.

"She'th a little lump of talent, if you only realithed it—a perfect little lump of talent."

Smythe disengaged himself gently, and tried to get away.

"I'll think it over," he said pleasantly, but De Castro followed him up.

"Will you? An ecthtra thong, tha'th all it needth to be—juth one ecthtra thong. Oh, it will be *thuch* an improvement."

Seeing Von Rettenmayer coming, he thought to strengthen his claim somewhat, if only by the merest hint of the attaché's agreement with his own views. "Ah, here'th the baron," he lisped. "We've been thitting together, I and the baron." Then he caught Smythe's hand, and wrung it warmly. "Thankth, thankth, I'm awfully obligedth."

"Glad to see you, baron," said Smythe, turning to Von Rettenmayer.

The blond German bowed.

"So goot of you to haf me," he said.

"Well, excuse me now, I'm just going to wash my hands——" began Smythe, but his star was not in the ascendant in that hour, because Von Rettenmayer also detained him.

"Bardon, one momend," he said, lowering his guttural voice to the same confidential note as that adopted by De Castro. "May I dague the liberdy of indulging in a liddle gridicism of your egzellent play?"

"Certainly," said Smythe, with that wonderful smile of his, which promised so much and meant so little.

"Gome here," and the baron drew him away from the tables. "De zecond aggd!" His manner was so serious that the proprietor of the Pandora was actually beguiled into taking some notice of it. "De zecond aggd," he repeated, "the bard where de jharming Miss Parradell is jhanging her gosdume."

"Yes, yes," was the answer.

"Dat's where the biece reguires lifding—lifding," and he accompanied the words with an expressive gesture.

"Lifting," repeated Smythe, now decidedly puzzled.

"So. De gomedians are glever, eggsdremely glever——" and again a wheedling arm caught the manager's. "But if you could zee your way glear to give Enid, Miss Mongrieff, another danz."

"Ah, just so!" It was evident now how the piece was to be lifted.

"It would remove the zolidary imberfection," pursued the baron.

"I'll think it over," promised Smythe, releasing himself once more. "I'm just going to wash my hands. We'll talk about it later."

"Schoensten Dank," cried Von Rettenmayer, confident that he had, at last, gained his point. But the hapless Smythe only contrived to run full tilt into two new arrivals, Colonel the Honorable Arthur Stidulph and his wife. Mrs. Stidulph, a mature but still beautiful woman, was dressed in the height of fashion, and wore rather too many jewels. The material of her evening gown was of the exact tint of her skin, and the effect of the diamonds sparkling on the corsage was rather startling until one perceived that they were not pinned on her flesh, but secured in the ordinary way. Colonel Stidulph looked a little more faded, a little more weary, than on the day when Nicko Jeyes met him outside St. James's Palace, but his wife was still, as ever, Dolly Ensor, and she greeted Smythe with a kiss, following up this somewhat pronounced method of showing her pleasure by saying affectedly: "How lucky that I'm able to come to you to-night. It's so difficult to catch me in the season."

"Have you been in front?" asked her old employer, easily evading this artless desire for sympathy because of the excessive demands of society on her time.

Instantly her manner changed, and her stilted voice took on a note of boredom.

"M'yes; oh yes."

Smythe understood that sort of reply from one who had been in the profession.

"What, don't you like it?" he cried, genuinely surprised.

"Oh, I don't say I *dis*like it," and Mrs. Stidulph shrugged her plump shoulders affectedly, "but one can't forget what one *used* to do here in the old days."

Her husband, who could never accustom himself to Dolly Ensor's social lapses, broke in graciously, if rather nervously:

"I've had a most enjoyable evening, Carlton. The performance is so bright—so very bright! It quite takes one out of one's self."

Mrs. Stidulph was moved to sneer at him.

"Oh, anything pleases *you*," she said, with an unpleasant guffaw. "*You'd* laugh at Punch and Judy."

"I'm just running away to wash my hands," explained Smythe. "You know Von Rettenmayer?" and he caught the baron's eye despairingly.

"Know him!" cried Mrs. Stidulph. "Why,

he was about in my time. . . . My dear Karl!"

Von Rettenmayer's heels clicked loudly, and he doubled up in profound obeisance.

"My dear lady!" he murmured. "Whad blizz!"

The pestered Smythe was actually half-way through a set of folding-doors when he encountered Fulkerson and Farncombe. Fulkerson, who had been dining extensively, and wining no less, introduced Lord Farncombe with much ceremony, and Smythe seemed to be in for another conversation when Fulkerson, espying Mrs. Stidulph, created a diversion by hailing her uproariously.

"By Jove, if it isn't Dolly Ensor!" he cried. "What cheer, Dolly!" And he hurried up with outstretched hand.

Mrs. Stidulph thought it high time to assert her dignity. She gave him a stiff little nod, and said coldly:

"How d'ye do, Mr. Fulkerson?"

For a second or two, he was actually abashed.

"I—oh, I'm pretty middlin'; I hope you're the same," he stammered.

Farncombe, who had been watching him, was obviously disconcerted, and Smythe explained to him, too, that his hands needed washing, but only found himself face to face with Gabrielle Kato, a pretty young woman whose fretful lit-

tle face was expressive of extreme dissatisfaction with the world. She looked at him spiritlessly.

"This *is* a treat," she drawled. "Why, you haven't been to see us for ages."

"I see you all far oftener than you suspect," said the cunning Smythe.

"Do you? That *is* sly of you."

He literally forced a waiter out of his path.

"I'm just going to have a wash and brush up," he shouted.

"Really?" murmured Gabrielle. "My, but you *are* full of news."

By this time, the foyer was alive with movement and chatter. Most of the guests had arrived, and Luigi was making final disposition of his corps of waiters. Fulkerson, evidently regarding himself as master of the ceremonies, dragged Lord Farncombe hither and thither, introducing him to various persons present. Whether they were members of the company or not, it was all the same to Fulkerson, who knew everybody, and embarrassed the young Viscount greatly by announcing his name and title in a high-pitched voice.

A band of musicians on the landing proclaimed their fell intent by the scraping of violins and the grunts of a 'cello, but Cooling hurried to stop a premature outburst, since the guest of the evening had not yet arrived. He

was met at the door by Roper, and the little man was very hot, but beaming all over.

"It's all right," he muttered in a stage whisper, "she'll be round in a minute."

"Amiable?" inquired Cooling anxiously, for he, too, did not look forward with delight to his next meeting with Lily.

"Angelic, my boy. She's wearing a new dress, and that's taken her mind off it."

"Oh, her bark's always worse than her bite. I knew it'd blow over."

Roper pursed his lips and threw out his chest formidably.

"My! but I've given her such a talking to," he declared.

Cooling grinned at him, and beckoned to the leader of the band, to whom he gave some directions, but Roper was not now to be depressed by his friend's skepticism, and bustled cheerfully into the throng in the middle of the room.

"Speshul edishun; all the winners! Py-per!" he called in the raucous voice of a street news-vendor. "Lytest cricket scores, py-per! Hul-lo, Dolly! Nita! Gabs! Daphne! Ah, there you are, Farncombe! You, too, Colonel! How's everybody?"

Enid Moncrieff, a long, spare-figured girl, exquisitely gowned, who walked with the sinuous grace of a dancer, came in at that moment, followed by some of the chief actors. Von Ret-

tenmayer rushed to meet her, took her hand, and kissed it with fervor.

"Ah, Miss Mongrieff!" he said. "Your danzing was more zurprising to-night dan efer."

But Fulkerson had seen Enid, and instantly dragged Farncombe towards her.

"I want to introdooce Lord Farncombe," he shrieked. "Miss Moncrieff—Mr. Tavish—Mr. Shirley—Lord Farncombe."

Enid shook hands listlessly, and was favoring this new acquaintance with a languishing glance of her dark eyes when Mrs. Stidulph approached. The two women embraced with the pronounced cordiality of hatred.

"Dolly, dear!" sighed Enid.

"Enid, darling!" gushed Mrs. Stidulph. "Good gracious, you're becoming an absolute skeleton!"

"Am I? Well, no one can say that of *you.*"

"But it *is* a pleasure meeting all you girls to-night," purred Mrs. Stidulph. "Of course, one cannot help seeing *changes.*"

"Ah," said Enid with icy languor, "that must be a pleasure."

"I'm going to scold dear old Carlton by-and-by," pouted the other. "He never gave me a birthday party when I was with him."

"No," said Enid; "and you had so many birthdays here, hadn't you?"

Mrs. Stidulph's face showed that the arrow had reached its mark, and Miss Moncrieff flushed with the triumphant knowledge that, for once, she had discomfited Dolly Ensor. Farncombe was aware of the scratching of claws beneath the fur, and Fulkerson almost earned his gratitude by hauling him off in the direction of four statuesque beauties with impassive faces, who had made an effective entrance from the back of the dress-circle; but Roper danced ahead of the young men and greeted the elegant quartette boisterously.

"Hullo! Show your tickets, please! Room inside for four! How are you, Flo? How goes it, Sybil? How d'ye do, Olga? I *say,* look at 'Vangy!"

Then Fulkerson's shrill voice rose above the din.

"Here, girls! I want to introdooce Lord Farncombe," he vociferated.

In the midst of all this excitement the stately manager, Maurice Cooling, had kept his head.

"Miss Parradell!" he announced grandiloquently, throwing wide a pair of double doors and signaling to the leader of the band, which promptly struck up the air of "Mind the Paint," as Lily entered with Jimmie Birch. She was dressed wholly in white, and certainly did justice to Roper's enthusiastic description of her as "angelic." She carried Farncombe's

bouquet, and the young man's heart throbbed at sight of it. But he was the only one who held aloof while the others pressed around her with welcoming words and outstretched hands.

"Many happy returns of the day!" rose the chorus, and she laughingly warded off the general assault until the valiant Jimmie Birch charged the crowd.

"For goodness' sake let us get in!" she cried. "Bertie, you idiot, you're on her frock! Do mind her frock!"

"Mind the paint!" yelled Roper.

A general laugh rose at that, and Lily held the bouquet above her head.

"Don't crush my roses!" she pleaded. "Do be careful of me, boys! One at a time! I'm going to shake hands with each of you, but I want to kiss the girls."

There was a flutter of embracing and exchange of laughing congratulations until someone cried suddenly, "Here's the guv'nor!" and Smythe came in. He, too, was mobbed; and, during that momentary lull, Lily discovered Farncombe standing in front of her. Nita Trevenna had not included him in the list of *invités*—in fact, the girl knew nothing of his coming, which was an afterthought on Roper's part—and, for one tranquil instant, Lily gazed at him with frank surprise, extending her hand and smiling carelessly.

"You here?" she said. "It isn't long before we meet again, is it?"

Then she grew conscious that Farncombe was looking at the bouquet she was carrying, and her face and neck flamed into rivalry with the La France roses, only to fly back to the wanness of the white Frau Karl Druschkis. His flowers! What would he think? Oh, if only the foyer but held a trap-door through which she could vanish! And what was he saying? Were those some of the roses he had bought her? What a compliment! How he blessed the florist who had recommended them to him!

By this time Carlton Smythe had extricated himself.

"Now, girls," he cried, "don't smother me! Where's Lily? Isn't she here yet? . . . Ah, there you are! God bless you, my girl! Many, many happy returns of the day!"

She went to him, and laid her head on his breast. He had invariably been so kind to her that she regarded him almost as a father. He patted her shoulders, and brushed her forehead with his lips.

"Lil, my dear, God bless you again!" he said, though not without a flitting thought that the young spark she had been talking to must have said or done something which would account for her half-hysterical state.

"Well," he continued, gazing round benevolently, "what about something to eat?"

Luigi was waiting for his cue.

"Ready, Mr. Smythe," he cried loudly. "Ladies and gentlemen, supper is ready."

Amidst the general bustle which followed this announcement, no one noticed that one of the waiters, a tall, strongly-built fellow, adorned with a mop of vividly red hair and pointed red beard, was gazing at Farncombe as though he would like to strangle him. Waiters, whether red-headed or otherwise, do not—in Britain, at any rate—strangle one of the principal guests at a merry-making festival like this birthday party at the Pandora Theater, while the guests, on their part, seldom pay the least heed to the physical peculiarities of the waiters, whom they regard as mere accessories to the feast, ranking with the furniture and napery.

The fun grew fast and furious, the clatter of cutlery and china contended with the volume of eager voices, and the red-headed waiter, who was relegated to the sideboard, became ferociously busy wrenching the corks out of bottles of champagne.

CHAPTER X

SOME MINOR ISSUES

About three o'clock in the morning Colonel Stidulph lounged aimlessly into the foyer. From the distant stage came the soft strains of a waltz, but he had watched the dancers till he was tired, and in sheer weariness of spirit was now seeking the solace of a cigarette. Save for a few waiters, the foyer was empty, but Stidulph noticed that a tall, square-shouldered, red-headed fellow was examining, apparently with an absorbed interest, a lady's bouquet which had been laid on a chesterfield.

On the floor near it lay a forgotten fan, a red rose which had fallen from a lady's corsage, and a pocket handkerchief with a powder-puff peeping from it. These latter were articles which the waiter might presumably have rescued, and placed conspicuously on a table, but he disregarded them completely, and was, in fact, intent on reading a card attached to the bouquet, which was composed of red and white carnations. He had not heard Stidulph's quiet tread on the soft carpet, but looked round

promptly when the Colonel lit a cigarette, and forthwith affected to busy himself in removing some of the soiled plates and empty glasses.

There was nothing particularly striking in the incident, and Stidulph only noted it as one of those trifling things in which a bored man may find momentary relief for his troubled thoughts. Still, he was puzzled. This stalwart attendant with the flaming red hair carried himself with a markedly different air from that of the jerky little Italians who formed Luigi's cohort. There was something vaguely familiar in his aspect—something that suggested the broken-down gentleman.

"Dash me!" muttered the Colonel *sotto voce;* "he has the cut of an army man."

At that moment, however, Luigi entered with slaves carrying champagne in wine-coolers, and trays laden with sandwiches and tumblers.

"Ain't you dancing, Colonel?" cried the *maître d'hôtel* familiarly, for Stidulph was an honored patron of Catani's.

"Dancing? I? No, Luigi, my dancing days are over."

"Oh, I like that," said the Italian, dexterously snipping the wire off a magnum. "Why, you used to be a regular slap-up dancing man when I first knew you, and I bet you ain't sixty. Come, now!"

Stidulph smiled, and shook his head. He

could not explain to the smooth-spoken Italian that lack of desire rather than the advance of age kept him from the frivolities that had lightened the bygone years.

"What's the hour, Luigi?" he asked. "I haven't a watch on me."

"About a quarter to three, Colonel."

"No later?" sighed Stidulph. "Oh dear, it's a long night;" and he subsided on to a settee in a corner.

The music ceased, and a babble of voices came from the corridor. Enid Moncrieff, escorted by a man named Heneage, was the first to appear. Close on her heels came Nita Trevenna, whose cavalier was another of the "boys," Gerald Grimwood, while Von Rettenmayer, obviously bored, brought in Mrs. Stidulph. Enid was gushing to Heneage about Ostend.

"Never been there!" she cried. "Then, my dear Stewie, you haven't been born. It's the duckiest place! I'm counting the hours to my holiday. I've fixed up rooms at the Hotel de la Plage. Why don't you run over while I'm there?"

It was as well, perhaps, that Nita's loud protestations drowned her voice. She was not aware that the baron was so near.

"I give you my solemn word it was not you, Gerry," Miss Trevenna was saying. "It was

that fool Bertie. Anyhow, it's a rotten old frock, and now it will have to go into the rag-box."

She showed a small rent in her skirt to Enid, laughing gayly the while, and doing a little step to display her neat shoes. Mrs. Stidulph, obviously displeased, whispered to the baron:

"Well, did you ever! Just fancy!"

Von Rettenmayer was gazing at Enid, and wondering why Heneage was paying her so much attention.

"I beg your bardon," he said absent-mindedly.

"Fancy those two girls walking into a room before *us!*"

Mrs. Stidulph was inclined to be cattish, but at that moment she discovered the fan. "Oh, I do believe that's mine," she said, darting for it before the baron could anticipate her. She turned at something he said. "No, thanks, I'm on a diet. Didn't you notice me at supper? Let us sit." Then she saw her husband. "Oh, get up, do," she cried affectedly, whereupon Stidulph rose with prompt obedience. "Why aren't you dancing? If you don't dance, go home and put yourself to bed. You might, for all the good you do here."

Stidulph laughed, and was moving away, but Von Rettenmayer called to him.

"Blendy of room for you, too, Golonel."

"No. I won't inconvenience you," said Stidulph placidly, and was making for the door when he came face to face with Farncombe and Lily Parradell. The girl darted forward, and seized his arm in her impulsive way.

"You are not dancing, Colonel Stidulph," she cried. "Dance the next with me; I'll make some man retire in your favor."

He smiled charmingly, with ready recognition of her youth and beauty.

"No, no; I'm too old," he protested.

"Too old for dancing! I should never be too old for that!"

She seized Gabrielle Kato, who had just entered with Roper, and pulled her to the couch, where reposed the bouquet which had invited the curiosity of the red-headed waiter. "Come and sit down," she said. "Lord Farncombe will keep on bringing us ices till the music starts again. . . . Gabby, was not that waltz delicious?"

"I say, Lil," murmured Miss Kato languidly, when Farncombe had hurried away to the refreshment counter. "How much did you make out of rubber through Lal?"

"Rubber—rubber? Br-r-r-r-h, I don't know. How much was it, Lal?"

"Four-fifty," said the stockbroker, preening himself. To be regarded as a financial genius was his special weakness.

"There!" murmured Gabrielle, "people do that kind of thing for you; but poor me never gets a chance."

"I did my house up with it," said Lily, "gave the job to young Charlie Ramsden, who has gone in for decorating."

"Yes, and blued the whole lot at one go," complained Roper.

"Blued it completely," laughed the girl. "But what does it matter? Isn't that what money is made for? . . . Oh, ices, delicious ices!" for Farncombe had appeared at her side with a waiter.

The red-headed waiter approached, and offered her a plate of sandwiches, which she declined without looking at him. A crowd of people came in, and Cooling was laughing at something Carlton Smythe had said.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he guffawed. "Capital, chief—first-rate! 'Pon my honor, you're in great form." He caught Stidulph's eye and hailed him. "Come here, Colonel, I want you to hear this."

Mrs. Stidulph glanced at the group of men, and a sudden thought seemed to cross her mind, because she turned at once to the baron.

"Of course, this is strictly between ourselves," she confided, "though I almost hinted as much to Smythe, but the fact is, the Pandora isn't in the least what it was, Karl."

"Noding iz whad it was, my dear Dolly," growled Von Rettenmayer, who was gazing gloomily at the vivacious Enid.

Mrs. Stidulph fanned herself coquettishly.

"I suppose he cannot find the artists, that's it," she said. "If you don't have the artists, well—! Of course, you recollect my Polly Taggart in 'The Merry Milliner,' don't you?"

The baron stifled a yawn with difficulty.

"Jharming, jharming," he murmured, but the lady was not to be put off by these stereotyped adjectives.

"I hate blowing my own trumpet," she said, "but I was looking through my press cuttings only yesterday, and I have never seen such notices as I had for Polly Taggart."

"Vavorable?" The baron's attention was wandering.

"Favorable!" she cried. "They made me blush to read them. It was stupid of me, but they did make me blush positively; and then, to give it all up, as I was idiot enough to do when I married, and for a life as dull as ditchwater! If ever a woman sacrificed herself in this world—! But I don't intend to stick to that arrangement. If I can't get back into the theaters—well, there are the halls. I was telling the Colonel only this morning——"

Roper appeared, programme in hand. The band had just struck up another waltz. "This

is ours, Dolly," said the little man cheerily, and Von Rettenmayer rose with alacrity.

"Aha!" he said, bowing magnificently. "I yield wid relugdanz."

Gabrielle Kato, finding that although there might be room for three on the chesterfield, there was no place for more than two in the conversation, had betaken herself and her ice to some other part of the foyer, and the two young people, left to themselves, were deep in talk until the opening bars of the music reached them. Farncombe rose and took her plate from Lily, handing it to the red-headed waiter, who happened to be standing quite near.

"Shall we go down?" he said. "This is our dance, I think."

The girl glanced at the bouquet, and seemed to be on the point of saying something, but checked herself, and looked at her programme. Then she frowned, and the Guardsman's alert ear caught a little click of annoyance.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

"One, two, three, four!" she counted in a low voice. "Why, this is our fifth dance!"

"Yes," he agreed, seemingly quite content with the arrangement.

"Five out of eight," she protested.

Farncombe affected to examine his own programme.

"And ten, twelve, and fourteen are mine, too," he said elatedly.

Lily shrugged her shoulders, and accepted his arm. Again she looked at the flowers, though her companion failed to notice the direction of her glance so long as it was not intended for some other man.

"It's awfully unfair," she pouted.

"Unfair?" he cried.

"Yes, to the others. I can't think what made me so thoughtless."

"Why, *there* it is!" shrieked Jimmie Birch, rushing forward to rescue the handkerchief and the puff, which were lying at her friend's feet. Quite candidly she rubbed the puff, an extremely ragged one, over her nose.

"There are no friends like the old friends,
The constant, tried, and true,"

she sang. "You two off?"

"Yes," said Farncombe politely. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Bring me a liqueur of petrol and a lucifer match."

He smiled. Fulkerson, who had just swallowed a large whisky-and-soda, chanced to set eyes on her.

"Hi!" he cried, rushing up, "we're booked. This is our vawlse—*Cry-dee-cure.*"

"Oh, why don't you go to a night-school?" demanded the girl. "Can't you pronounce French better than that? *Valse, Cri de Cœur*——" this with withering accuracy, but Fulkerson only wagged his head carelessly.

"Very likely," he said. "One way'sh good's 'nother for me. Come along, Jimmie."

"Jane to you, *if* you please," she said with much dignity.

"Tosh!" he answered.

"I was christened Jane, *Herbert.*"

"Well, I wasn't at the christening, see!"

"No, but if you're not more careful of those feet of yours while you're waltzing, you'll be at my funeral. You tore Nita's dress something awful."

They went out squabbling, and Enid Moncrieff happened to be left almost alone in the foyer with Von Rettenmayer. It was too good an opportunity to be missed, so she inquired anxiously:

"Well, what did you say to him?"

The baron was obviously gratified. He had not anticipated so favorable a reception.

"I dold him de biece wanted lifding in de zecond aggd, and dat he ought to gif you anoder danz," he said eagerly.

"Yes, but what did he say?" she demanded.

"Dat he would dink it over."

She drew herself up scornfully.

"That's Smythe's invariable answer, the cunning old fox!" she pouted.

"Bud we're to talk aboud id lader. I am waiding to ged him on one side," explained the baron.

"Pooh, you won't get him on one side, you stupid. He'll take precious good care of that." She glanced around, and, finding that every other member of the party had fled, while Luigi and the waiters were busy with their affairs, took a disconsolate step or two, and sighed: "Ah, but it isn't dancing that my mind is dwelling on just now, dear boy."

"So?" inquired Von Rettenmayer, following her.

"Yes, it's rest I'm yearning for—my holiday—rest for my weary bones. Karl, I'm simply bursting with rage!"

She made this startling declaration in the most lackadaisical manner imaginable, but the baron was highly solicitous.

"Whad is de madder?" he asked anxiously.

"That wretched hotel at Ostend, the Plage! They have the confounded impudence to ask me one hundred and twenty-five francs a day for two cubby-holes on the third floor for aunt and myself! Just fancy it!"

"Monsdrous!" shrugged Von Rettenmayer. "But Osdend is—Osdend!" and his hands spread deprecatingly.

"Thanks for the information," said Enid airily. "Is that all the sympathy you can offer?"

"I beg bardon; there may be jeaper hodels," he suggested.

Enid seated herself gracefully on the convenient arm of a settee, and swung a small and pretty foot.

"Where the common people pay for their beds and meals with coupons. . . . Oh, it doesn't matter. I suppose it'll have to be Swanage, or some really brisk resort of that description. Well, so be it! Life is made up of disappointments!"

Von Rettenmayer, too, had seated himself close to her. His usually good-humored face was clouded. In fact, the baron was calculating.

"A hundred and dwendy-five frangs a day," he muttered.

"Including nothing—absolutely nothing."

He bit his nails in thought. Already he had conjured up a distasteful vision of long columns of figures, decked with strange curls and flourishes, and totaling to an appalling sum.

"Precizely! And dere's de eading and dringing."

"One cannot starve, that's certain."

"Which would amound to?"

"I believe aunt and I should manage to feed

ourselves on forty francs a day—or fifty—at a pinch."

The baron's face grew longer and longer. Such was his distress that he didn't notice how amusedly the girl was watching him out of the corner of her eye.

"A hundred and dwendy-five and fifdy," he sighed.

"Yes, a hundred and seventy-five. Call it two hundred;" and she stroked his hair gently with a disengaged hand.

Von Rettenmayer leaned back. He liked having his hair stroked.

"Fifdy-zix bounds a weeg!" he growled.

"Sixty, in round figures," said Enid.

"For a fordnide?" he inquired, with the air of a man resigned to the worst blow that fate can inflict.

"Oh, no, dear; a fortnight's no use to me," she said sweetly.

"Bud one begomes sig of a blace after a fordnide," he urged.

"If you go only for enjoyment, not if you go for a rest—a real rest."

"Dree weegs, then," he pleaded.

"A month," she said firmly. "Smythe gives me the whole of August."

"Ach Gott, a month," and the baron passed a hand across his forehead frenziedly. Enid, bearing in mind an ancient proverb anent the

turning of a worm, stooped and carefully picked a piece of fluff from off her skirt.

"We're losing this dance. Shall we have a turn?" she inquired indifferently.

The baron sprang upright; he was breathing heavily, but his face wore the expression of one who had resolved to dare everything.

"Enid," he almost whispered.

"Yes," she said guilelessly.

Von Rettenmayer's heels clicked, and his bow was deeper than ever.

"If you would permid me to be your bankger during your stay ad Osdend—four weegs——"

"Oh, Karl!" she broke in.

"I would be most gradified," he continued.

She went up to him alluringly.

"Karl, I couldn't. It's such an obligation." The words came from her lips, but her eyes spoke differently, and he bowed again.

"On my zide," he said, with a magnanimous disregard for the truth.

"Of course," she went on, evidently regarding the matter as settled, "I defray my own traveling expenses and tips and incidentals. Not a penny of those shall fall on you."

Von Rettenmayer caught her hand and drew her nearer, but she backed away quickly with a warning gesture, because Colonel Stidulph had wandered in once more to smoke a consoling

cigarette. The Colonel was a kindly man, and came to her assistance.

" Do you know you are losing a very pretty waltz, Miss Moncrieff? " he said.

" I was just saying so to the baron," she cried. " Come along, do! It'll be half over."

Stidulph retired to his favorite corner, but he was not destined to be left in peace at that moment, because De Castro brought in Gabrielle Kato through another door, and it was quite noticeable that the lady was doleful and the gentleman exceedingly sulky.

" Ah, Miss Kato! Ah, Sam! A pleasant party, eh? " cried the Colonel.

" Yeth," lisped De Castro, in whose face there was thunder; " a damned pleathant party!" he muttered under his breath as Stidulph went out.

" Well," said his companion, " whatever you may think, don't make a scene."

" Thene? *I'm* not making a thene. You walked away from me in the middle of a danthe, and left me thtanding there thtaring after you like a detherted child. *You're* making the thene——"

" I am very sorry," she said, dabbing at her eyes with a lace handkerchief. But the great and only Sam was not to be appeased so readily.

" I'm jutht ath good a waltther ath anyone here, and better than motht," he bleated, wav-

ing his arms wildly. "If you're tired of me, announthe the fact quietly. Don't go and wipe your bootth on me in public, becauthe that hurtth my pride."

Gabrielle twisted her lithe body in a movement expressive of utmost anguish.

"I can't do more than apologize," she almost sobbed. "And it's the first time I've ever done *that* to a man."

She flung herself hopelessly on a settee, and De Castro, after a sheepish glance or two, grew mollified.

"I don't athk it, Gabth—I don't athk it," he said. "All I athk ith fair play and dethenthy."

"I know I've been rude," said the girl, "but it's owing to my low spirits. I'm so shockingly low-spirited. Mine is a strange nature. On the stage I'm liveliness itself——"

"A perfect little lump of talent," broke in her admirer. "I've been tellin' Carlton tho—perthuadin' him to introduthe an ecthtra thong for you in Act Two."

"You have?" Miss Kato brightened for an instant, but it was only a passing gleam. "Did he promise to think it over?" she added gloomily.

"Hith exthact wordth."

"Ha, ha!" It was astonishing that so pretty a girl could produce such a hollow laugh. She relapsed into melancholy. "As I was remark-

ing," she said, " I'm a mass of inconsistency. On the stage the embodiment of elfin fun——"

" That wath in the *Mail,*" put in De Castro rather maliciously. But she merely nodded. Her sorrows were beyond such pin-pricking.

" In the *Mail,*" she agreed listlessly. " Off the stage I'm a sufferer from what's called the artistic temperature—no, temperament."

" Poor little girl! poor little girl!" De Castro patted her shoulder soothingly, yet his sallow, flabby features wore an expression of discomfort rather than of sympathy—perhaps he guessed what was coming.

" Sometimes," murmured the drooping Gabrielle, " I've an idea that if I had a motor-car of my own I should feel easier and happier."

" What d'ye mean—motor-car of your own? Mine'th alwayth at your dithpothal, ith-n't it? " and Sam's uneasiness grew positively painful. Miss Kato shook her head—a charming little head, which really ought not to be so weighed down by sorrows capable of being assuaged.

" That's not the same thing," she pouted. " Whenever I have yours out I'm oppressed by a sense of borrowing."

" Well," urged De Castro, " if I gave you a new car you'd be opprethed by a thenthe of my having paid for it, wouldn't you? "

She considered the point, but dismissed it.

"At first I should," she said, "but not for long. Seeing my family crest on the panels instead of your monogram would help me to forget that you had had anything to do with it. Of course, it'd be only an experiment, at the best. It might cheer me up, or it mightn't."

The music ceased. Soon the foyer would be full of a chattering crowd, and De Castro felt that he simply could not dissemble at this trying moment. He ran a finger around inside his collar to loosen it.

"Look here," he cried in desperation, "we'd better dithcuth thith experiment. Let'th go an' thit in the pit."

"I can't argue," sighed Gabrielle, rising to accompany him for all that. "I really can't argue; my head's far too bad for that."

He led her to the landing, meaning to avoid the rush along the corridor.

"I don't want to argue," he said thickly; "I thimply want to arrive at an underthtandin'. Thuppothin' I buy you a car, am I to be made an ath of at the nectht danthe we happen to meet at? Now, yeth or no?"

Fulkerson raced in, but was so intent on reaching the counter where the drinks were served that he failed to note their hurried exit.

"Hi! wake up there!" he shouted to a waiter. "Gla'soda-wa'rf'Misspirch'onth'-stage."

The man understood him perfectly, but Fulkerson thought he did not.

"Misspirch—onth'stage—gla'—sodawa'r," he repeated, pausing, as well as he could, after each word. "I'll have a whisky. Wh'sth'-whisky? Which—is—the—whisky? Thang 'oo."

Grabbing the bottle indicated by the waiter, he poured a far too liberal quantity of the spirit into a tumbler.

"You take sodawa-r t' Misspirch," he frowned. "I'll mix m'own whisky. Loo' sharp! Sodawa-r Misspirch."

Gulping down the contents of the glass, he began to sing:

"Oh the gals! oh the gals! I am awf'ly fond of the gals!
Be they ebon or blond, of the gals I am fond;
I am dreadfully fond of the gals!"

He caught sight of Farncombe and Lily through the glass upper halves of the folding-doors, and lurched away with an erratic celerity that might hardly be looked for from one in his present condition. But he was afraid of Lily. She might order him home, and he didn't mean to go home just yet—not for a jolly long time. Why should he? This was life. This was the real thing. Some fellows he knew would willingly have paid hundreds of pounds to have been invited there that night. Go home? Not he!

CHAPTER XI

THE END OF THE FROLIC

THERE was an air of constraint—almost of irritation—about Lily Parradell which was so unnatural that even the lovesick Farncombe noticed it. He racked his brains to discover if he could possibly have said or done anything to annoy her, but his conscience acquitted him, and he strove to disregard her manifest *malaise*.

"Another ice?" he asked, after an awkward pause, when she had answered in a monosyllable some casual remark about the regimental marquee at Ascot.

"No, thanks!" she replied, stooping to regain her bouquet, in which she buried her flushed face promptly. Then, and not till then, did he learn that she had changed bouquets during some earlier interval. These flowers were carnations, not roses!

"Oh!" he said, and the flow of words so suddenly available as suddenly deserted him. The fount of his eloquence died at its source. He felt as a thirst-maddened Arab might feel

when he reaches the smiling oasis only to find that it was a mirage; or, rather, to drop from metaphor to fact, the few glasses of champagne he had swallowed had gone to his head, and the measure of his present dejection was that of his earlier beatitude.

She pretended to misunderstand that involuntary cry.

"Don't you like it?" she exclaimed. "I found it among the others in my dressing-room. It's from the gallery-boys—and I attach some value to it. You must not forget, Lord Farncombe, that I am an actress first and foremost, and the applause of the gallery is the breath of my nostrils, whatever that may mean, though I know it means something pleasant. Moreover, isn't it touching to think of those youngsters clubbing together with their sixpences to buy me such a nice present?"

She spoke rather hurriedly, but continued to look at him with steady eyes. Yet, sad to relate, Miss Lily Parradell was not being quite so candid as her words and manner seemed to imply. During the whole of supper-time she had striven vainly to find some plausible means of escape from the false position in which that beautiful but unhappy bouquet of roses had placed her. A chance visit to her dressing-room, and the sight of the gallery-boys' tribute, had suggested a harmless yet effective artifice.

More than once during the evening she was on the verge of showing the new bouquet to her admirer, though wishing that he might perceive the exchange for himself. But Farncombe had eyes only for her; this time, she determined he should notice it.

"You are kind—to the gallery-boys—but rather cruel—to me," said Farncombe at last.

She wished most devoutly that this young man did not possess the faculty of rendering her tongue-tied. She was completely at a loss what to say, and the two were smiling at each other, he somewhat wistfully, and she with not a little embarrassment, when the red-haired waiter banged open a door, seized a box of cigars off the counter, and banged out again, performing this simple duty with an amount of unnecessary noise that would have earned one of Luigi's "regulars" a stern reprimand.

Farncombe came to the girl's relief. He fumbled with his programme, and read:

"Number nine—Two-step: 'Mind the Paint.' . . . Of course you're engaged for this?" he inquired.

"And you, surely?" she cried, thankful for his tact, if inclined to marvel at it.

"No. I—er—I kept it open—in case—in case——"

"I dance it with Morrie," she said decis-

ively, without the least affectation of not following his stammering intent.

"Mr. Cooling?" he murmured politely.

"Yes, Morrie Cooling."

Farncombe was rapidly acquiring a subtle knowledge of a woman's ways. He believed that this charming and vivacious girl was far more amenable to a judicious pause than to his finest flight of eloquence. So he remained silent now purposely, and Lily sat down. Uninvited, he sat near her.

"Miss Parradell?" he said at last.

"Well?" If nothing else, he had certainly succeeded in making her nervous.

"I wonder if Mr. Cooling would let you off this dance?"

"I shouldn't dream of asking him," she answered.

"No, of course not. But may I?"

"I beg you'll do nothing of the sort," she said, almost haughtily.

"Forgive me!" murmured Farncombe, and there was another pause, so prolonged that Lily herself was forced to break it.

"I spoke so—so sharply to you—just now——" she began, but her companion could not bear that she should reproach herself with his apparent blunder.

"You didn't speak sharply to me," he protested.

"Oh, but I did, and it was because I have been very nasty with Morrie—I wrote him a furious letter—and I want to make it up to him."

"Ah, yes," sighed Farncombe. How well she could "make it up" to Cooling, or to any man, when she chose!

"I called him a pig and other things," went on Lily hurriedly, "and now I hate myself for it."

"A pig?" It was difficult for Farncombe to grasp essentials when he was under Lily's spell, but the word jarred on him a little. A smile did away with the effect in a moment.

"Still, that's no reason why I should be nasty to you," she said.

"And call *me* a pig," he laughed. The infatuated youth now found some element of humor in the word. Lily, always impulsive, bent nearer, so that she might compare her programme with his, and the fragrance of her, the mere scent of her hair, was bewildering.

"Look here," she said, in what she meant to be a friendly tone and nothing else, "I want to make it up to you now. Fifteen—the last but one. Are you fixed up for fifteen?"

"No," he replied, without even a glance at his own programme.

"No!" she repeated, rounding her eyebrows.

"I—I kept it open—in case——"

The girl laughed merrily. She could not help it. His adulation was so open, so complete. Then she remembered the self-imposed check on a serious flirtation of which the changing of the bouquets was the earliest outcome.

"I may be able to give you fifteen," she said severely, seeing that Farncombe was scribbling her name at once. "Don't count on it, please; but it's booked to Mr. Fulkerson, and Bertie's not always to be depended upon at that hour."

"Thank you—thank you. You have no idea what a night this has been for me," he cried eagerly. Greatly daring, he followed her example, and edged a little nearer, though Lily had drawn away from him as soon as she had glanced at the ball programme. "That reminds me. May I ask who is going to see you home, Miss Parradell?"

"See me home?" From Lily's astonished intonation, it might have been imagined she had never before been asked such a question by a young man.

"It would be an honor that I should—appreciate—more than I can—find words to express," he said humbly.

She rose, picking up her bouquet, and shot a somewhat indignant glance at him.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said,

giving the words an emphasis that was decidedly chilling, "but I dare say Mr. Roper will see me home—and Mr. de Castro—and Mr. Bland." She walked a few steps towards the door, and Farncombe followed her.

"I—I hope—I—I haven't offended you," he said.

"Not in the least," came the frigid reply, "only that I'm in the habit of relying on old friends for those little services."

Stidulph, that lost soul, entered, and with him came the strains of "Mind the Paint," played by the orchestra to the lively measure of a two-step, and the young Guardsman drew himself up with the air of a man who has made a mistake, and is ready to bear the punishment.

"Shall I—take you to Mr. Cooling?" he said in a voice that was well under control.

Lily, still on her dignity, inclined her head in the most approved style of theatrical haughtiness. She was putting her hand through his arm, when the look of despair on his face softened her, and she became her own sweet self again.

"Have I hurt you?" she whispered.

"Oh, I deserve the rebuke," he said manfully.

"No, you don't," she cooed. "You're a nice boy, and I'm sure you only meant to be attentive. You may leave me at my door with

the others if it will give you any satisfaction."

An almost uncontrollable emotion choked Farncombe's utterance. Hot and passionate words were whirling in his brain when the bulky form of Cooling appeared in the doorway. He was breathless with the extra exertion of climbing stairs and hurrying along the corridor.

" Ah, there you are! " he cried. " I've been looking for you everywhere."

" Except the one place where you were sure to find me," cried the girl, her manner altering completely from the tension of the last few minutes. " Come on, Morrie! " She danced a step or two to the music and sang a line of the chorus; then, handing her bouquet to Farncombe with a cheerful request that he should bring her flowers to her afterwards, she thrust an arm through Cooling's, and the two ran out dancing and singing, for the consequential and heavily built manager could unbend with the best of them when Lily Parradell was his partner.

Farncombe, still wrapt in a paradise of his own by Lily's forgiveness and ultimate concession, was following, when Stidulph called to him.

" Spare me a moment," he said, laying a hand on his arm—" that is, if you aren't dancing."

"No; I am free," said the Guardsman a trifle impatiently, perhaps, because it was in his mind to watch Lily Parradell's graceful dancing from the dress circle. His admiration of her sylph-like movements was no mere outcome of calf love. She personified the very spirit of carnival, and was quite as fascinating to the onlooker in an ordinary waltz as when indulging in the more elaborate or less restrained posturings on the stage.

Colonel Stidulph, however, seemed to be at a loss to know how to begin. Indeed, he had set himself a difficult and thankless task, and might well feel uncertain as to the way in which the younger man would take it.

"Excuse me for what I am going to say," he almost whispered, "but I—I know your father —knew him very well years ago—and your mother. My boy—my dear boy, it's hard——"

"Why, what's the matter, Colonel!" cried Farncombe, both surprised and mystified by Stidulph's manner.

"Well, I—I'm sorry to find you in this set."

Farncombe drew up stiffly at that; he guessed now what was coming.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Don't be angry with me," said Stidulph brokenly. "I'm an old man and an old fool; but it is from the fools that the useful lessons are to be learnt by those who are wiser."

Farncombe withdrew his arm and affected to inhale the scent of Lily's carnations.

"I really don't understand you," he said.

"Try to," pleaded Stidulph; "not now—another time, when this music isn't exciting you, nor these pretty women. Think it out by yourself! You're at the beginning of your career, my boy. Remember me—the old fool who has brought himself to a miserable end—and that I cautioned you—cautioned you——!"

Luigi rushed in, followed by the red-headed waiter and another carrying a tray. The little Italian was laughing boisterously.

"Ha, ha!" he cackled. "Why don't you join 'em, gentlemen? You're losing it all! They're having a romp—a regular old lark! That's right, your lordship," as Farncombe ran off. "Make haste, Colonel; they're sure to want you, and I 'ave known the time——"

Stidulph went out slowly, and Luigi began to bustle about the counter.

"Whisky-and-soda for Mr. Tavish; liqueur brandy, Mr. Grimwood." He banged the glasses down on the tray and one of his aides vanished with them. The taller man, who had thrust his hands into his pockets, was watching Luigi grimly, and when the presiding genius of Catani's would have gone out again in order to watch the frolic on the stage, he called him back.

"Here, Luigi," he said, taking out a handful of money and selecting a couple of sovereigns, "give this to your chaps."

"Oh, you're spoiling them, Captain," said the smiling Italian.

"Never mind; and these are for you." Some more gold changed hands, and Luigi bowed low.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I hope you have enjoyed yourself."

"Oh, thoroughly, though what between one thing and another it was warm work. I'll be off now, with your permission," and Jeyes stretched out his arms with the action of a man who has been carrying a heavy burden and is testing his muscles to make certain that they have survived the ordeal.

"Shall I see you at lunch, Captain?" said the grinning Luigi.

"Probably. . . . Good-night, or rather, good-morning."

Jeyes seemed to have lost some of his military bearing. He actually slouched away to a side door, and stopped there a moment listening to the music. Suddenly both he and the Italian became aware of a tumult. People were singing uproariously, shouting and laughing, and the sounds came nearer; evidently some sort of pandemonium had broken loose. Not for the first time had the air of "Mind the

Paint " sent the red blood rioting through the veins of men and women.

" Hullo! " growled Jeyes between his teeth, " they're coming this way." He retreated swiftly to the back of the counter, and Luigi peeped out.

" Ha, ha, ha! " he cried delightedly. " Now they're at it! "

Fulkerson was the *avant-courrier* of the revelers. He rushed in, flourishing his arms madly, and skipping like a satyr. His bloodshot eyes were almost starting out of their sockets with excitement, and his usually pallid face was now absolutely livid. Behind him came Lily Parradell, carried on the interlocked arms of two men belonging to the company, while a third held her by the waist lest any accident should happen to her. Two by two came the rest of the revelers, singing the chorus of " Mind the Paint " and dancing it with fantastic extravagance. Even the self-contained Carlton Smythe and the ponderous Morrie Cooling were indulging in a can-can, and Dolly Ensor fancied she was back in the heyday of Polly Taggart. The party circled the foyer twice, and some of the Italian waiters, whose hot Southern blood was not to be denied when saturnalia broke loose, joined in *con amore.* Lily, waving her bouquet, was alternately shrieking with laughter and breathlessly imploring her carriers not to drop her.

The orchestra, knowing that their patrons were engaged in a mad gallop around the theater, played with redoubled energy, and Jimmie Birch, thinking that some of the men needed stimulating to fresh exertions, broke from the cue and jumped on to a settee, to sing at the top of her voice:

"Mind the paint! Mind the paint!
A girl is not a sinner just because she's not a saint!" . . .

"Please don't drop me!" screamed Lily. "Oh, please——"

Luigi threw open the folding doors, and out the frenzied procession raced, followed by all the Italians. Jeyes came from behind the bar, thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered towards the side door, for which he had been making when the frolic began.

Stidulph, who had come in again, and was lighting his fiftieth cigarette, gazed at him curiously once more.

"That's the same waiter chap who was so interested in Lily Parradell's bouquet," he mused. "Dash it all! I've seen him somewhere. I can't make it out; he's a queer-looking customer to be a waiter, anyhow. . . . Good Lord, what time is this thing going to stop?"

* * * * *

When Jeyes reached the street, he staggered like a drunken man. With an effort he pulled

himself together, and inhaled a few deep breaths of the morning air, or of that peculiar variety of morning air which clings to London after it has been well scoured by hose-pipes during the quiet hours.

A dozen or more automobiles lined the curb, and a number of cigarette-smoking chauffeurs eyed him to ascertain if, by chance, he should be the particular employer each was on the lookout for. Naturally, he felt that his appearance was more remarkable than was actually warranted by the facts, so he donned the silk hat he was carrying, and then remembered, with a vague sense of annoyance, that the hat would not fit over the wig. He managed to balance it precariously while wriggling into a light overcoat, but the hat fell off, and rolled into the gutter, which was still swimming with water after the street-cleaning operations.

He recovered it, and walked away, miserably conscious that the incident would provide the group of grinning chauffeurs with ample material for humorous comment. None of them dared laugh outright, since Jeyes was too big a man to take liberties with.

At the next corner he encountered an empty taxi, bowling home from " a late job," and the driver, having ascertained that Jermyn Street was the objective, agreed to take him there. Once in the vehicle, Jeyes surveyed his dam-

aged hat, for the mind insensibly assuages its greater sorrows by yielding to minor ones.

"Poor old topper!" he said, smiling grimly at its apparent ruin, "you're like myself—lost your gloss, and plunging headlong into the mire!"

Then he was seized with an unreasonable anger against the offending wig, which he tore off and threw into the street. The beard followed, though not without inflicting a few seconds of torture, and both articles excited much speculation in the breast of a policeman who found them some minutes later.

But the policeman's musings were without form and void as compared with those of the taxi-driver when Jeyes alighted outside his chambers and produced a liberal fare. The man's sharp, half-scared expression stirred Nicko's bemused wits.

"Oh, it's all right," he laughed savagely. "I haven't been taking part in a tragedy—at least, not the sort of thing the newspapers are interested in. It was only a joke—the silliest kind of joke you ever heard of—and I suddenly grew tired of it. . . . I live here. . . . It's all right, I tell you. . . . Good-morning!"

The driver saw that this queer masquerader did really possess a key which gave admission to the set of flats, and was slightly reassured when Jeyes went in and closed the door. But

he noted the number of the house, and the hour —one never knew—strange things happened in London.

Jeyes went to his rooms, washed off some of the adhesive stuff which had kept the beard in place, and was minded to go to bed. He heard a clock chime the half-hour, and glanced at his watch—half-past three. Half-an-hour ago. . . . He swore savagely. . . .

"Angling for him!" he snarled. "Lily—my Lily—actually angling for him! Oh, she's artful, like the rest of her sex! Brought his flowers to the theater, and then grew coy—played the *ingénue* by staging the gallery-boys' bouquet. That was sly, d——d sly! . . . Oh, Lily, Lily!"

His body swayed as though he were racked with pain. He was sitting in an arm-chair, but he sprang up in obedience to an impulse, mixed himself a strong whisky-and-soda, which he drank at a gulp, and donned his overcoat again. Picking up the damaged hat, his glance fell on its smears of half-dried mud. He threw it aside angrily, raced into an adjoining room, rummaged in a drawer, and took out a deerstalker cap. Then, lighting a cigarette, he went out, and if the taxi-driver could have seen his face at that moment, the man would certainly have confided his suspicions to the nearest policeman.

CHAPTER XII

SMOLDERING ASHES

It was four o'clock on a summer's morning and necessarily broad daylight—even in London—when the peace of Bloomsbury was disturbed by the snorting of three automobiles, which drew up, one behind the other, close to the pavement in front of Lily Parradell's house. Limousine doors were flung open almost simultaneously, and several of the revelers from the Pandora Theater alighted.

Lily was escorted by Enid Moncrieff, Roper, and Farncombe. Jimmy Birch had in her train Von Rettenmayer, Fulkerson, and Vincent Bland, and De Castro was accompanied by Gabrielle Kato and Daphne Dure, the latter one of the Pandora girls who happened to live in the same locality as Gabrielle. She was the only one of the party who seemed to be borne down by sleepiness; the others were wide awake, but pale and haggard. The men looked as if Carlton Smythe's specific of a wash and brush up would do them good, and even the graceful girls bore traces in their slightly di-

sheveled hair of the delightful romp which had just come to an end.

Lily ran up the steps, and opened the door with a latchkey. "Come in, everybody," she said; "do take off your wraps for a minute. We'll go to my boudoir. It's the only habitable room in the house at this hour."

Fulkerson, whose inebriety had reached the argumentative stage, held forth for a moment on the door-step. "Working classhes!" he cried. "Don't talk t' me 'bout th' working classhes!"

"Oh, hush, Bertie," said Jimmie Birch. "*Do* shut up. People may hear you."

"I'm s'h'ick o' th' ve'y mention o' th' name —working classhes!" he repeated emphatically.

"Oh, sit on his head, somebody. We shall wake ma and the servants," cried Jimmie concernedly.

Lily laughed. They were already on the stairs.

"Don't worry," she said, tossing the words over her shoulder. "You won't wake my servants, and mother's bound to hear us; she sleeps so lightly when I'm out."

Daphne yawned candidly, and stumbled. There was an ominous tearing sound of some gauzy material.

"Serve you right, my girl," said Jimmie. "Where's your manners?"

LORD FARNCOMBE EMBRACES LILY AGAINST HER WILL

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The boudoir was on the second floor. Lily, who was now carrying a bouquet composed of white and pink roses, made straight for the windows and drew up the blinds, letting in the cold, clear, morning light. Wraps and overcoats were disposed carelessly in the first place that offered, and Fulkerson threw his impedimenta on the floor; he was still wrestling with some imaginary grievance.

"One 'ud 'magine th' working mansh th' only pershon who ever does day'sh work! Ridic'lush!" he declared.

Von Rettenmayer and Bland seemed to be amused, and De Castro unbent so far as to take up the parable.

"There'th thome truth in what Bertie'th thayin', though," he lisped. "For inthtanthe——"

But Fulkerson was in no mood to listen to anybody else.

"Bri'sh working-man," he growled, with manifest disgust.

"By Jove, yes, he's a bit of a fraud!" put in Roper, hoping, by agreement, to wheedle Fulkerson into a more amiable mood. "When I think of the work Mr. Lionel Hesketh Roper manages to dispose of in the course of a day——!" He threw up his arms and nodded his head to signify that he was quite at a loss for an adequate figure of speech.

Lily announced that she was going to re-

assure her mother, lest ma should wake with a start and think there were burglars in the house.

"If any of you want a drink, you must hunt for it yourselves in the dining-room," she said. "You play host, Uncle Lal."

Farncombe, Bland, and Roper nearly fell over each other in their haste to open the door, but Farncombe won, being the youngest and most active.

"Now then, give your orders, gents!" cried Roper briskly. "Ladies, don't all speak at once."

Fulkerson plunged forward wildly. "I'll have a sma' whisky-an'-soda," he said. Bland followed him, and Miss Birch sent Roper also in pursuit.

"Do stop that boy," she cried. "We'll have trouble enough to get him home as it is."

"Can I ged you anyding, Enid?" said Von Rettenmayer.

"A glass of soda-water, please," was her answer.

"The same for me, Von," put in Miss Kato.

The big, blond German looked down upon the tired Daphne, who had curled herself up on a box-ottoman, and was already half asleep. She was a good-looking girl, and her face lost in repose the somewhat sulky expression she had borrowed from her friend, Gabrielle Kato.

"Baby—baby——" he murmured sentimentally.

"Don't disturb her," said Jimmie Birch. "Let her have her snooze in peace."

But the baron seemed to find the picture rather attractive. "Shall I bring you your boddle, you priddy liddle baby?" he murmured. Enid turned on him irritably. Tempers are apt to be short at four o'clock in the morning: in any case, he had no business to admire another girl, no matter what the hour might be.

"Don't be an idiot, Karl," she snapped. . . . "Sam, will *you* fetch me some soda-water?"

Then Von Rettenmayer bethought himself. "I beg bardon," he said humbly, and went out with De Castro. Snatching up a hand-mirror, Enid looked at herself critically.

"What a sight!" she exclaimed. "Gabs, do you think Lil would mind my going into her bedroom?"

"Of course she wouldn't," said Gabrielle, taking the mirror in turn, and viewing herself with like dismay. "Oh, I'm yellower than you! Isn't this light awful?"

She threw aside the mirror, and both girls hurried away. Jimmie Birch, though not concerned about her personal appearance as these professional beauties, could not resist the claims of curiosity. She, too, examined her features critically.

"Oh, you lovely creature!" she cried, glancing at Farncombe while readjusting a comb in her hair. She found that he was gazing at her earnestly. "Young man," she chirped, "turn your face to the wall, please; I'm about to use my puff."

Suddenly, with rapid, stealthy movements, he closed one of the doors which the others had left open, and crept close to the astonished girl. She stared at him, thinking frankly that the chill air of morning had proved too much for him, but his low, earnest words soon undeceived her.

"Miss Birch," he said, "you're Miss Parradell's friend—her great friend. Will you be a friend of mine, too, and do me a service?"

"It—it all depends——" she answered, genuinely startled.

"I want you to beg her to allow me to remain behind, with you, for a few minutes after the others have gone."

"Remain here—you and I?" she repeated.

"Yes, and then, if she permits it, will you wait in the next room while I speak to her? . . . Miss Birch, I—I must speak to her."

He was almost incoherent with anxiety, but she understood perfectly.

"W-w-wouldn't—to-morrow do?" she stammered. "She's tired, you know."

"Five minutes," pleaded Farncombe, "no

longer. Won't you try to arrange it for me?"

Jimmie, who had soon regained her equipose, pursed her lips and looked demure; without any preliminary warning, life had become undeniably exciting.

"H'm!" she murmured. "Of course, *I'd* stay; delighted, I'm sure. It doesn't matter how tired *I* feel."

"I know I'm a brute," said Farncombe contritely.

"But I really think the arranging is your job, Lord Farncombe," she continued.

"Oh, with all these people around me, I should make a horrible bungle of it, and attract attention. *You're* clever! No one will notice you."

The girl raised her eyes to his in a saucy, quizzing, yet friendly way.

"Look here," she said, "am I guessing correctly? Do you want to ask Lily to marry you?"

"Yes," he said.

Although the reply was just what she expected, it gave her a shock. In her excitement she caught hold of him.

"Are you sure?" she demanded.

"Yes," came the decisive answer. "My mind is made up as firmly as it'll ever be on any matter. . . . You'll help me—say you'll help me?"

Jimmie walked about in a flutter. The situation was critical, and called for strenuous action. Finally she paused, as though some practicable scheme had occurred to her.

"There's one thing I *will* do," she said, pointing to the writing-table; "scribble her a note—a line—and I'll give it to her. That won't attract attention. I've no objection to do that much for you. . . . Hurry up! You'll find notepaper in the drawer. . . . What bunglers you men are! Here's a pen! Will a 'J' suit you?"

By this time she was as breathlessly intent on the affair as Farncombe himself, and had followed him to the table and thrust a pen into his hand.

"What shall I say?" he cried, gazing up at her for inspiration. They looked into each other's eyes in blank dismay.

"Well, I never!" she laughed. "*I* don't know. Still, it isn't exactly a love-letter, is it? —Simply say—what was the expression you used just now?—'Will you allow me to remain behind for a few minutes with Miss Birch after the others have gone?'"

"Thank you," sighed Farncombe, beginning to write.

"You can call me Jimmie if you like," she conceded.

"Thank you," he said. The girl knit her

brows thoughtfully. Someone might return at any second, yet, on reconsideration, the note would sound rather bald in its present form.

"I suppose you ought to give her an inkling, though—the merest hint—of the *reason,* oughtn't you?" she asked.

Farncombe looked up anxiously.

"Do you think so?" he said.

"Well, you don't want her to imagine it's only a chat about the weather——"

"For heaven's sake, don't chaff me!" he said earnestly, and began to write on his own account. "How will this do? 'I know I am presuming a lot, but I—I can't leave you till I—till I have asked you—till I have asked you the most important question a man can put to a woman.'"

"Oh, but that's ideal!" she cried, clapping her hands.

Gabrielle came in, but did not hear Jimmie's *sotto voce* exclamation, "Dash those girls!" the truth being that Gabrielle's complexion was much improved, and Miss Birch promptly noted the fact.

"Lord Farncombe is writing me out a remedy for freckles—isn't it sweet of him?" she said.

"Freckles," murmured Gabrielle mournfully. "If you want to see a martyr to freckles, knock at my door."

Now Enid joined them. Her lips were a little too red and her cheeks a little too pink, but she looked charming, as Von Rettenmayer evidently thought when he and De Castro entered with tumblers and a syphon of soda-water.

"I hobe we haf nod kepd you waiding," he cried.

"Bertie'th been makin' himthelf a reg'lar nuithanthe downthtairth," exclaimed De Castro.

"Poor Bertie!" said Enid. "It's a pity he has this little failing."

Gabrielle became even mildly enthusiastic.

"There's not a nicer boy in London, bar that," she said.

"Do be quick!" muttered Jimmie Birch under her breath, and Farncombe completed and folded the note hastily. No one was paying any heed to them, because Bland and Roper were hauling Fulkerson upstairs, and the trio encountered Lily on the landing.

"Lirry—Misspa'dell," cried Fulkerson indignantly.

"Now you can have it out with her!" said Roper, who was puffing like a grampus.

"My! What's wrong?" demanded Lily.

"Mosht unjusht'fiable treatmen' 'n the part 'f these gen'lemen!" said Fulkerson, lurching into the room after her, and scowling at his supporters.

"The dear youth is irate with us for cutting

off supplies," put in Bland, responding to the questioning look in Lily's face.

"M'argumen's this," said Fulkerson doggedly: "When a gen'leman'sh invited b'th' lady'f th' house t' partake 'f refreshmen'——"

"Oh, be quiet, Bertie, or I'll box your ears," said the girl, turning from him with a shrug of good-natured tolerance. "I've had such a wigging for asking you all up. Mother says we girls 'll look as ugly as sin on the stage to-night."

"So we shall—absolute hags," agreed Enid.

"I feel as fresh as paint," laughed Lily. "Give me a sip of your soda-water, Gabrielle."

Fulkerson, denied any further stimulant, and still dominated by an unacknowledged fear of Lily Parradell, turned his attention to the sleeping Daphne. He gazed at her stupidly, and began to sing to himself, "Oh, the gals! Oh, the gals! I am awfully fond of the gals!" The Baron and Roper, even the elderly Sam, who ought to have known better, began to hum the ridiculous air, whereupon Bland, with a fine assumption of authority, screwed in his eyeglass firmly.

"Hush, hush! Ma's quite right," he said, seating himself at the piano. "One more turn, and then let's clear out," and his fingers ran lightly up and down the keyboard in the prelude to a languorous waltz. Lily Parradell,

whose fund of vitality was apparently inexhaustible, and feeling, perhaps, that as hostess she must not allow herself to wear even the semblance of inhospitality, leaped up from the chair into which she had dropped.

"Hurrah! One more dance," she cried. "Shut the door, Uncle Lal!"

"Choose your partners, gents!" cried the irrepressible Roper, and Jimmie Birch ran across the room to thrust Farncombe's note into Lily's palm.

"Rat-tat, says the postman," she whispered, and, promptly seizing Roper, swung him off in a waltz.

Lily found that Farncombe was looking at her; she signaled to him gayly, and soon they were whirling around with the others, while Fulkerson nearly frightened Daphne out of her wits by pulling her off the sofa, and literally dragging her into the waltz movement before she was well awake.

Lily, aware of something curious and hidden about the note she was holding, opened it and glanced at the contents over Farncombe's shoulder. "Dear Miss Parradell," she read; than she turned hurriedly to the signature.

"Is this from you?" she said, lifting her eyes to her partner's for an instant.

"Yes," he answered hoarsely.

She read on quietly to the end, when she

stopped dancing, and the two stood for a little while gazing confusedly at each other. The girl's face was otherwise quite expressionless. She slipped the note into her dress, and held out her arms again with a mute invitation that they should continue the waltz. It had a pleasant refrain, and, by this time, most of the others were humming it.

"If you would only, only love me;
If you would merely, merely say,
Wait but a little, a little for me,
I will be yours, be yours some day."

At last Bland shut down the piano-lid with a bang.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, rising and bowing gracefully, "the festivities connected with Miss Parradell's birthday are over. Our lives will now resume their normal, serious course."

There was a murmur of approval. Even the brightest and liveliest of gatherings must have an end, though they all felt that this supper and dance would be memorable in the annals of the Pandora Theater.

"Nobody can say the affair hasn't been a brilliant success—that's one comfort," cried Roper.

"It wouldn't be true if they did," said Gabrielle. She turned to De Castro, who was

helping her with a wrap, and exclaimed in a snappy aside: "You have got it inside out."

"Ah, yes, haven't we had a splendid, splendid time!" cried Lily.

"Splendid!" echoed Enid.

"A jharming bardy!"

"Abtholutely A 1!"

There was even a snatch of melody:

"Venus, seinen Nacken beut
Dir Dein Sklave, dienstbereit!"

Lily ran to Roper and seized his hands.

"A vote of thanks to Uncle Lal for his share in getting it up!" she cried.

"Bravo, Lal!" said Bland, slapping Roper on the back.

"And to Carlton," added the girl. "Don't forget Carlton!"

"Or Morrie Coolin'!" put in De Castro, struggling with his overcoat.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "We can't forget dear old Morrie!"

"There hathn't been a hitch from thtart to finith," added De Castro.

"Not a hitch," said Lily.

Fulkerson suddenly recollected his grievance, and struck a discordant note.

"I beg yo' par'n. There wash a 'itch! When a gen'leman'sh invited b'th'lady'f th'house t'partake'f some refreshment——"

His words were drowned in an outburst of laughter, and Lily whispered to Bland, "Do take care of him!" In the midst of a chorus of farewells she seemed to bethink herself of something which had slipped her memory.

"Uncle Lal! Jimmie!" she cried. "I want to speak to you two for a second. . . . Oh, and you, Lord Farncombe! . . . Now, you others—no noise, please! *Au revoir sans adieux, mes enfants!* Vincent, *you* close the front door."

She watched her guests descending the stairs, and returned to the room. Her manner had become strangely soft and subdued.

"Lord Farncombe wants to have a quiet talk with me—about—about something," she said, addressing Roper, "and he has asked me to let him remain behind with Jimmie for a few minutes. But there's no necessity for you to wait, dear," she added, looking at her friend.

"Oh, don't consider *me*," gasped Jimmie.

"But I do. Go upstairs and tell mother that Lord Farncombe's with me. Say I promise he shan't stay long. . . . You'll take Jimmie home, won't you, Lal?"

Roper's eyes were starting out of his head. This development, pleasant as it was, had come upon him with the overwhelming force of an avalanche.

"W-w-with pleasure," he stammered.

"I shall see you again later in the day, per-

haps," said Lily to Jimmie, affecting a commonplace manner she was far from feeling.

"Rather! Ra-ther!" and the girl's arms were flung round Lily's neck, while the two kissed affectionately. Darting a significant order at Roper: "Sit in the hall till I'm ready," Jimmie ran out, pausing at the door, before she ascended the stairs, to bestow a smile and a parting nod on Farncombe.

The stockbroker was in a state of ill-subdued exhilaration. His was a good-natured soul, and he rejoiced in the promised outcome of his scheming.

"Yes, yes," he bleated, "I won't keep these ewe lambs from their *tête-à-tête*. Catch me!"

Laughing hysterically, he patted Lily's face, and took a hand in both of his.

"Lil," he said, "you call me Uncle Lal, but I've always felt more like a parent towards you—acted as such, eh?"

"Yes, dear," she murmured.

"And any happiness that befalls you—any happiness that befalls you——" he choked over the words. . . . "Well, I'll leave it there! God bless you! God bless you!" Then he bustled across to Farncombe, who, in the pretense of departing with the others, held his hat in his hand and carried an overcoat on his arm. "And God bless you, my lad! I am proud—proud to have the honor—to have been the

means of—the means of . . .'' He broke off to wring the young man's hand heartily, and muttered: "Anyhow, God bless you both. . . . I —I'll drop in by and by and inquire after *you*, my pet.''

"All right, Lal,'' said Lily faintly.

"Ha, ha, ha!'' The little man did a hop, skip and a jump in his elation. "Wurrr-roo!'' he shouted. "Stand away from the lift! No more passengers this journey!'' And out he went.

Then the two faced each other. At last they were alone. The only movement in the room was the gentle stirring of muslin curtains when a light breeze sighed through an open window. They listened, almost breathlessly it would seem, to Roper descending the stairs and humming the refrain of the waltz:

> "If you would only, only love me;
> If you would merely, merely say,
> Wait but a little, a little for me,
> I will be yours, be yours some day."

Light footsteps raced across the landing—Jimmie Birch was hurrying to join her escort. A door closed beneath. A motor purred in the street. From the trees in the square came an angelic chorus of birds greeting the sun.

CHAPTER XIII

WHICH BEGIN TO GLOW

It was Farncombe who first found his tongue. Placing his overcoat and hat on the nearest chair, he advanced towards the girl with outstretched hands.

"It's awfully kind and gracious of you to have granted my request," he said, "and frightfully selfish of me to have made it. I deserve to be kicked."

She avoided his gaze. Though his eyes were devouring her he was far too nervous to see that she was compelling herself to regain control of her faculties, perhaps of her emotions.

"Is—is Jimmie aware of precisely what's in your note?" she asked quietly.

"Yes." He drew a little nearer, but she had contrived to place herself so that a table intervened, and when he threatened to pass that barrier she moved slightly, aimlessly fingering some object on it, but studiously avoiding him.

"I do hope you won't be angry with me for confiding in her," he said, and she could not

fail to catch the tension in his voice. "You see, I—I had to give her a reason."

Lily shrugged her shoulders. She was still deeply interested in some photograph or knick-knack of the boudoir.

"And she will confide in Uncle Lal," she commented with a *moue* of smiling discontent. "Oh, but dear old Lal appears to have summed up the situation pretty accurately as it is," and she marked the afterthought by an artificial little laugh. "Well, I'm afraid they'll be horribly disappointed, poor wretches!"

"Disappointed!" said Farncombe blankly. He dared not, even to himself, admit that he understood. Then the girl raised eyes that were electrically blue in this searching light, and shook her head at him reprovingly.

"You silly, silly boy!" she cried, though, strive as she might, she could not tune her mood to the requisite pitch of raillery. In his sudden despair, Farncombe disregarded her obvious wish to keep him at a distance. He came closer, with an impetuous movement, and seized a hand.

"Ah, please—please don't take that tone with me," he cried. "I'm no boy. And I'm simply mad about you. If you don't marry me, I—I'm done for."

The eager, pleading, unbalanced words came tumbling out without any heed to form or sense,

yet they stirred Lily Parradell a good deal more than she cared to show. Nor did she find it an easy task to utter her thoughts, to marshal them in ordered sequence. All she could say was:

"Hush! Nonsense! Not you!"

"It's true. Life will be over for me from the moment you refuse to marry me."

"Over!"

He was aware only of the effort at mockery; he could not guess what that effort cost her.

"Naturally, the love is all on my side at present," he said, striving desperately to shake her apparent self-possession. "But, as God hears me, it will be no fault of mine if you don't grow to love me in time."

"Listen——" she broke in; but the tumult in his heart was unendurable, and he cried frenziedly:

"I'll worship you—worship you! I *do* worship you!"

"Lord Farncombe——"

"You know my name——"

"How can I——"

"Won't you, dear?—please—for to-day—Eddie."

"Well then—Eddie."

"Ah!"

He seemed to consider it so great a point gained that she retracted hurriedly.

"Sit down a minute," she entreated, and she herself dropped into a chair. Evidently, she was somewhat ruffled, and she pushed her hair back from her forehead impatiently, as though vexed at her own lack of will-power. "Now, Lord Farncombe—Eddie—for how long have you known me?" she said severely, or with what she intended for severity.

"What does it matter?" he urged. "I—I admit——"

But Lily held up a warning hand, and nodded her pretty head in a most business-like way.

"Reckoning our acquaintance from the afternoon Bertie brought you here," she said, "when, as it happened, we scarcely spoke to one another, you haven't met me as many times as you can count on your fingers."

"But I've watched you—watched you in the theater——"

She laughed, quite pleasantly, with the ready tolerance of experience for simplicity.

"On the stage! Oh, you—but I mustn't call you a silly boy again, must I? And, pray, what do you know of me, apart from the few glimpses you've had of me off the stage and the fact that I'm a shining light of the Pandora? What do you know of my—what's the word?—origin—where and what I've sprung from—how I was reared—how much education I've received—how much I've contrived to pick

up of the way to behave in *perlite* society? You can judge from my poor mother, if from nothing else, that I came from humble beginnings. Yes, but *how* humble you couldn't dream, not after a supper of raw carrots!"

If she fancied that by the concluding deft touch of low comedy she could bring this young man to realize the absurdity of the dream he was harboring already, she was mistaken.

He bent forward in the chair he had occupied close to hers, and said earnestly:

"Do you think I care how humble your beginnings were? What I do know—what I *am* sure about—is that you're good—and beautiful—and—and—gifted; and—oh, I can't describe you. . . . You're—you're—to me you're perfect."

"Perfect!" She looked at him with blinking eyelids. "You—you dear!"

He took heart of grace at that remark, so she resumed her pose of gentle irony instantly.

"Perfect!" she repeated. "*Merci! Oui, pour le moment.* . . . Hear my French! It's a nice language for—for expressing one's self agreeably."

But the imminent slip had been so narrowly averted that she grew confused, and took a box of cigarettes from the table.

"Have one? No, don't get up," and she tossed a cigarette to him before he could rise.

"My name is printed on them—'Lily.' Isn't it *chic*?"

The lovelorn youth at once produced a cigarette-case, and exchanged one of his own for that which she had given him.

"I'll never smoke *that*," he vowed.

She flushed slightly, and pushed a match-stand across the table.

"Don't be stupid," she said, nervously aware that this man, alone among her friends, had the trick of disconcerting her. "Now, attend to me, please. Let us look back a bit over the uninteresting career of Lily Parradell, the 'Mind the Paint Girl.' What do you say to a start in a tiny provision-shop in Kennington, over the water?"

"Admirable! Does it matter which bank of the Thames you were born on—Lily?"

She blew a little puff of smoke at him playfully.

"You've got to understand," she said, feeling sure of herself now, sure that she could disillusion him, yet hardly knowing what effect the process might have on her own feelings afterwards. "That was my start in the world. Father kept a small shop in Kennington—Gladwin Street, near the Oval. We sold groceries, and butter and eggs, and cheese, and pickled pork, and paraffin. I was born there—on the second floor; and in Gladwin Street I lived till

I was fourteen. Then father smashed, through the Stores cutting into our little trade. Well, hardly smashed; that's too imposing. The business just faded, and one morning we didn't bother to take the shutters down. Then, after a while, father got a starvation berth—eighteen shillings a week!—at a wholesale bacon warehouse—Price and Moseley's—still over the water; and I earned an extra five at a place in the Westminster Bridge Road, for pasting the gilt edges on to *passe-partouts* from nine a. m. till six in the evening."

Her hearer's head was bowed; he seemed to find it hard, almost impossible, to picture the popular idol of the Pandora Theater as one among the hordes of anæmic, ill-dressed girls whom he had seen passing to and from their work at those very hours—silent, swift-moving, with pinched, pallid faces, grim and gaunt beyond their years.

" Great heavens! " he muttered.

" Don't you breathe a syllable against the *passe-partouts,*" said Lily, affecting lightly to misunderstand him; " they were the making of me. It was the *passe-partouts* that brought me and Tedder together."

" Tedder? " He glanced up inquiringly; the name was new to him.

" Oh, you've never heard of Tedder," she laughed. " In the house where I worked—

away up on one of the upper floors—a man named Ambrose Tedder taught dancing—stage-dancing—'Tedder's Academy of Saltatory Art'—I can see those words now, in white letters on a brown door. And many a time as I passed, and heard his violin or piano and the sound of his pupils' feet, I felt something rise in my soul that took a bit of the gilt off the picture frames during the next half-hour. . . . Oh, dear, once I get talking of those days——"

She broke off abruptly, and threw herself back, but, suddenly recollecting the disagreeable task she had imposed on herself, she began to talk again swiftly, almost passionately, relapsing of set purpose into the colloquial slang of the Kennington Park Road.

"When other girls were going to school I was earning my living," she cried. "I've never passed through the flapper age. It was work for me almost as soon as I could read properly. . . . Well, ultimately Tedder took me and trained me—did it for nix—for what he hoped to get out of me in the future. My word, he hasn't lost over me, poor old Ambrose! He collared a third of my salary for ever so long; and now that the old chap's rheumaticky and worn out, I—— It's not worth mentioning."

She sprang up and walked half-way across the room. The habit of the stage was strong

upon her, and this bit of real life was not to be laid bare in all its unattractive crudity while she was sitting like a decorous young lady at a tea-party.

"My stars, he could teach, could Tedder!" she vowed. "I began by going to him for the last twenty minutes of my dinner-hour. He wanted to stop *that*, because it was bad for me, he said, to practice on a full—a full . . . Oh, it's too funny! As if my poor little tummy ever was full in those days!"

She was laughing now, but there were tears in her eyes, and the man who loved her held out his hands in mute appeal that she would distress herself no more. That involuntary action warned her that she must continue.

"I was a pupil of Tedder's for twelve months," she went on more collectedly, "and then he got me on at the Canterbury; and from the Canterbury I went to Gatti's, and from Gatti's to the Lane, for a few lines in the pantomime and an understudy—my first appearance in the West End. 'Oh, the West End is the Best End!' You remember the song? No, of course you don't. You were a good little boy going to school when I was earning my living. From there I went to the old Strand, and then did a turn at the Canterbury, where, thank my stars! Vincent Bland dropped

in one night and heard me sing a little song. Morrie Cooling spotted me, too, and that led to my being engaged at the Pandora, where I ate my heart out doing next to nothing for two whole years. Then came the production of 'The Duchess of Brixton,' and it was in the 'Duchess,' owing to Vincent's good memory, that I sang 'Mind the Paint.' He believed in me, did Vincent; *he* saw that I was fit for something more than just prancing about and airing my ankles in a gay frock. By Jove! how he fought for me—*how* he fought for me up to the final rehearsal! And to this day, whenever I indulge in a prayer, you bet Vincent Bland has a paragraph all to himself in it."

Something in Farncombe's dejected attitude warned her that she had gone far enough. She walked over to him, and put her hand lightly on his shoulder, and her manner changed.

"I am sorry," she said. "I needn't have inflicted quite so much of my biography on you, but I did want to tell you enough to show you —to show you——"

He sprang upright, and gazed into her eyes with a passionate intensity that might be startling, but could not fail to charm the woman whom he said he loved. And he completed the sentence with no little skill.

"To show me what a *marvel* you are," he said.

For an instant she forgot the moral of her lecture. Despite her wonderful success on the stage, she was only a girl in heart, and it was gratifying to find such a man hanging upon her very words, praising her without stint for what she had done, taking her for what she was rather than for what she had been. She cooed with the low, joyous laugh of the woman who knows that she is holding spell-bound the man who loves her. Carried away by the excitement of the moment, she put her hands familiarly on his shoulders.

"Yes," she said breathlessly; "and all the schooling I've ever had, Eddie, was at a cheap, frowsy day-school in Kennington, with a tribe of other common, skinny-legged brats. Imagine it! I don't say I am not proud of myself really. Why shouldn't I be? Many a woman would feel as vain as a peacock in my shoes. Fancy! From the shop in Gladwin Street to *this!*" and one hand swept regally around her domain. "And from Tedder's stuffy room in the Westminster Bridge Road to the stage of the Pandora as principal girl. It's an achievement, of course, and I did it myself. Everything I've learnt since—except my music, which I owe to Tedder and Vincent—but everything else I've learnt by sheer cuteness from novels, the papers, the theaters, and by keeping my ears open like a cunning little

parrot. Ah, that's what I am—just a clever little parrot."

Not a word of Jeyes, of the long walks together, of the hours spent in picture-galleries and museums—these were forgotten for the hour. She laughed gleefully, and Farncombe laughed with her. He was beginning to hope again; he drew the happiest auguries from this tender intimacy.

"Oh, and I dare say," she went on, tossing her head in a careless gesture that was characteristic, "I could imitate the fine lydies *you* mix with, so that in less than six months you'd hardly know the difference between them and me."

He caught her hands and held them to his breast.

"There is no difference already," he murmured. "There *is* none."

"Isn't there?" and she almost nestled up to him. "Ah, but you should see me in one of my vile tempers. Then—then you wouldn't——"

Becoming conscious of how close she was to him, and of a dangerous topic, she moved back quickly, and looked at him with a flush of embarrassment. "Anyhow," she said—"anyhow, it isn't my intention to give you a chance of comparing us."

"Oh, Miss Parradell!" he broke in.

"No," she said firmly. "I'm not going to let you make a fool of yourself over *me*, if I can help it."

"A fool!" he cried. "Is it folly that I should want you to be my wife?"

But she was mistress of herself now, and spoke quietly but decisively.

"You must recollect, however shrewd and apt I may be, and however straight I've managed to keep myself, still—I'm only a Pandora girl, and would always be remembered as one by your chums and belongings. Only a Pandora girl! Nothing can alter that, dear boy; and you mustn't—you really mustn't handicap yourself by hanging *me* round your neck."

He flared into protest at that.

"What law is there," he cried eagerly, "that says a man shall not marry the woman he loves, and, if I might dare to add, the woman who loves him? Should I be the first of my class to marry an actress?"

"No," she answered seriously; "but—without wishing to flatter you—I don't quite put you on a level with some of the fellows who have married girls from the theater. They were nice boys, but rather what you might call 'rotters.' You are not like any of them—not a little bit. And so," she added cheerfully, turning away to take his hat and coat and give

them to him, "I mean to take care of you, not only for your own sake, but for your daddy's and mammy's sake too. Now, time's up."

He had a dazed look in his eyes which hurt her dreadfully, and there was a slight pause, during which neither of them stirred. Then she forced herself to say with a certain flippancy:

"Now, Eddie, never mind. You'll survive it. . . . Come along."

She passed him, meaning to enforce her words by opening the door, but before she knew what had happened, Farncombe had flung aside his hat and coat, and had clasped her in his arms.

"Lily, Lily!" he almost sobbed.

"Ah, that's not fair!" she cried.

"But don't—don't send me away like this!"

"It isn't fair of you!"

"Say you'll take time to consider!"

"Oh, I shall hate you for it! And I have trusted you!"

"Ask Roper's advice—your mother's——!" he pleaded.

"Eddie! Lord Farncombe——!"

There was no mistaking her tone this time. He released her, and they confronted one another, she panting and wild-eyed with what she thought was only surprise, he hanging his head guiltily.

"W-w-well," she stammered, "I—I *have* been mistaken in you."

He turned away in an attitude of blank despair, and struck his temples with his clenched fists.

"I—I—— Forgive me! At least, forgive me!" he said brokenly.

"Ha! And I—I thought you were such a quiet, bashful fellow!"

"I can only ask you to forgive me," he said again, with an utter dejection that had a far more potent effect than he knew. She was evidently wavering, and, after a moment's indecision, approached him slowly.

"Don't—don't fret about it," she said gently. "I do forgive you. If anybody is to blame, it is I;" and she drew a deep breath. "I had no business to give you all those dances."

Her words seemed to stir irresistible memories, and he swung round on her, seizing her hand, and kissing it passionately.

"I may see you again?" he asked. "Say I may see you again! Lily! Lily! Lily!"

She averted her head, for the strain was beginning to tell upon her.

"No," she whispered; "we'd better not."

Then, when the tension was becoming unendurable, they were both aware of a low but distinct knocking on the door which communi-

cated with the landing and staircase. The girl withdrew her hand quickly, and each looked at the other, he inquiringly, and she with a sort of scare which passed instantly when the knocking was repeated.

"Mother!" she cried, "is that you?"

She went to the door, and took hold of the handle, but, with the natural nervousness of a woman in face of the unexpected at such a time and place, did not open the door at once.

"That you, mother?" she cried more loudly.

There was no answer. Again came that mysterious tap upon the panels.

"Then who is it?" she said boldly, and opened the door with a jerk.

A man was standing there—a tall man, whose overcoat was buttoned up to his chin, and who was wearing a cap drawn low over his brows, but one swift glance at the drawn white face and determined jaws told her the startling truth.

"Nicko! You!" she almost screamed. "How have *you* got in?"

Jeyes entered without uttering a word, and there was a truculence, almost a murderous fierceness, in his manner which caused her to start and spring back in alarm, while Farncombe took a hurried pace or two forward. But Jeyes stood stock-still once he was well in the room, and, after a questioning glare at the

young Viscount, as though daring him to come nearer, he produced a bunch of keys, and grimly displayed a latchkey. The sight of it seemed to rouse Lily Parradell to a heedless fury.

"Oh!" she almost screamed, running to close the door, and then swiftly turning to appeal to Farncombe. "I owe you an explanation of this insolence. Captain Jeyes is in the habit of bringing me home from the theater after my work; and a long while ago I gave him a latchkey, so that he could let me into my house whenever I had forgotten my own key. He hasn't the slightest right to use it any other time, and nobody knows that better than he does. It's a confounded liberty!"

Then she turned on Jeyes with lightning in her eyes. "What are you doing here at all at this hour of the morning?" she asked.

Jeyes almost ignored her. He bent an expressive glance on Farncombe, a glance which conveyed the insult it intended.

"An odd question in the circumstances," he sneered.

"Answer me!" cried Lily determinedly. "Why are you here?"

"I'm keeping an eye on you," he growled.

"Spying on me!" she said bitterly.

"Oh, on both of you!" and he jerked his

head towards Farncombe with that same hint of deadly insult.

"How dare you! How dare you!" she cried.

"I have been at it all night, too. I was even in the theater while you were supping and dancing."

"*You* were!" and the girl's voice almost cracked in her excitement.

"Yes, I *meant* to be there. You did your best to stop it——"

"That's a lie!" she broke in vehemently.

"So that you could enjoy yourself thoroughly with this young spark," he continued, giving a malicious emphasis to each biting word.

"Again a lie!" she breathed chokingly.

"I didn't leave till past three," he explained, still speaking with a cool malevolence that carried deadly conviction. "You and your friend there had just had your fifth dance together, and they were hauling you round the building."

"Where were you?" she demanded, almost stunned by the consciousness that he must really have been in the theater.

"Excuse me; that's my business," he retorted. "Then when I could stand it no longer, I went back to Jermyn Street, but it suddenly struck me I should like to see how your home-going escort was composed."

"You've been watching outside?" she said, moved to a bitter contempt.

"Since a quarter to four—under the portico at the corner." Then, yielding to a sense of intolerable wrong, he cried hoarsely:

"But, by God! I wasn't quite prepared for this!"

"This!" Lily screamed the word as though he had struck her with a whip.

Jeyes crammed his cap into his overcoat pocket, and strode close up to Farncombe. "What the hell's your game?" he demanded fiercely. "You've got some accommodating friends, both of you, in that blackguard Roper and that slut, Jimmie Birch!"

For an instant it seemed as though the two men meant to fly at each other's throats. The girl sprang between them, her fists clenched, and her eyes blazing.

"Oh, you cur!" she said, in the accents of ineffable scorn, "you low cur!"

CHAPTER XIV

AND ULTIMATELY BURST INTO FLAME

FARNCOMBE was the first to recover some measure of sanity. He had been stung almost to the madness of attacking Jeyes by the coarse and brutal insinuations which had come from the man's lips, but the greater horror which he feared—that Lily herself should strike her slanderer—induced an anguished appeal for restraint.

"Miss Parradell!" he cried, and drew her away gently.

"Oh, you cur!" she said again, glaring at Jeyes with bitter eyes. "My mother has been told that Lord Farncombe is with me. I sent Jimmie up to tell her."

"Where is your mother?" came the rasping demand.

"In bed, of course."

"Snoring! Ha, ha! Faugh; there's an ugly name, my girl, for mothers such as yours!"

"Oh! Oh!"

She could not even speak intelligibly now, but that low wail wrung Farncombe's heart with

agony. Bitterly conscious that this vulgar intruder had some sort of right to be there, he kept his head.

" Captain Jeyes," he said sternly, " do you happen to know where I live? "

For an instant Jeyes condescended to look at him.

" No," he snarled. " I don't know where your sty is."

" St. James's Place—forty-seven. I shall be in at twelve o'clock."

His steady look and resolute air quieted Jeyes for a moment, and Farncombe picked up his hat and overcoat. He turned to the half-frenzied girl.

" From the tone this gentleman adopts, Miss Parradell," he said, " I assume that he considers himself entitled to concern himself in your affairs. I hope to have an opportunity to dispute his claim. Perhaps it will make it easier for you now if I——"

Lily ran to him and caught his arm despairingly.

" Ah, I'm so indignant that I don't know what to say," she sobbed. " But you must not go, Eddie, until——"

" Eddie! Eddie! "

Despite the acute distress of the moment, the two became aware of the heart-broken way in which Jeyes repeated his rival's name; but

the knowledge that he was suffering only stirred the girl to a new fury. She turned on him with a spitfire intensity that was appalling.

"Yes, you cad!" she screamed. "Eddie! *Eddie!* EDDIE! You wretched sneak! You idler! You waster! . . . But I've done with you now! I've stood it long enough! This is the last straw, and I'm sick to death of you! How I've tolerated you all these years is a mystery to me! . . . After this get out of my sight and never show yourself to me again."

For answer Jeyes grasped her wrist fiercely.

"Lily!——" he began; but, before Farncombe could interfere, which he was strongly tempted to do, she had wrenched herself free, and apparently lost all control over herself.

"*What!*" she shrieked. "You spy on me, will you, you shabby loafer? You'll peep at me while I'm eating my supper and count the dances I choose to give that boy over there, will you? And then you'll break into my house and insult my friends behind their backs, and insinuate foul things against my poor old mother —you damned coward! And against me and *him!* Why, you're not fit to black his boots, and you never were—never—you scum! . . . Here!"—and she took Farncombe's note from her bosom and thrust it upon Jeyes. "Read that! Read it! Read it! Out loud!"—because Jeyes had begun to read silently.

He obeyed, but awkwardly, mumbling the words:

"'Dear Miss Parradell—Will you allow me'——"

"Louder!" she stormed.

"'Will you allow me,'" he resumed, "'to remain behind for a few minutes with Miss Jimmie after the others have gone? I know I am presuming a lot, but I cannot leave you till I have asked you the most important question a man can put to a woman. Farncombe.'"

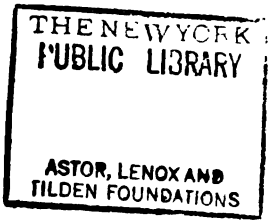
In the reaction from ungovernable rage to triumph, for there was no mistaking the red hue of defeat mounting in Nicko Jeyes's face, Lily became breathlessly explanatory.

"Written here—on my notepaper—while I was out of the room," she gasped. "It came on me like a thunder-clap. . . . And Morrie Cooling and Lal will tell you that I hadn't the ghost of a notion that Lord Farncombe was to be at the supper last night, or any of the boys—not a notion. And I blackguarded both of them for deceiving me, and causing me to deceive *you*. I wrote it to them—even mentioned you in the letter. . . . Now, what have you to say? . . . Oh dear! Oh dear!"

Jeyes had flung himself into a chair, and his gloomy eyes studied the pattern of the flamboyant carpet.

"Why the devil did you let Jimmie go?"

LILY COMPELS JEYES TO READ LORD FARNCOMBE'S NOTE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he said huskily. "Why did you let her go? It was knowing that you and Farncombe were alone that—that made me——"

"Oh, if I'd suspected that a private detective was hovering around, I'd have kept the lot of my friends!" was the disdainful reply. "As it was, Jimmie was looking dead, and—— Pah! . . . Why should I explain?"

Jeyes partly straightened himself, and drew a hand wearily across his forehead.

"Well, I—I beg your pardon," he said brokenly. "I'm not so completely *scum* as not to see that I ought to beg your pardon. I can't do more—now. I beg your pardon."

As was her way, Lily softened more readily than she had yielded to rage.

"You—you drive me mad sometimes; positively frantic," she said, swayed by some vague imagining that, if only she could restore relations to their normal state, the effect of a most disagreeable scene might yet be mitigated.

"Mad!" repeated Jeyes, partly to himself. "Yes, that's a truer word." He turned to the young Viscount, who, on his part, was completely undecided whether he ought to go or stay. "And you, Farncombe," he said, "I hope you'll accept my apologies! I offer them unreservedly!"

The only indication that Farncombe had heard him was a stiff bow, at which Jeyes sank

his head again—bewildered, crushed, almost abased—and Lily glanced with a new-born timidity from one man to the other. She was beginning to realize what her one-time lover must have suffered; she felt strangely humbled, too, because of the much finer attitude Farncombe had adopted than she herself when stung by false accusation.

" I—I didn't mean half I said, Nicko," she faltered. " I really didn't mean half of it. . . . And I'm ashamed of losing my self-control as I did."

There was a long and awkward pause before Jeyes rose to his feet and silently returned the note. Lily looked up at him piteously, and put the slip of paper back into her bosom; but he seemed to give no heed. Taking out his key-ring, he removed the latchkey from it, and threw the key on the table. Then, dragging the cap from his overcoat pocket, he was making for the door without another word. But this was too much. The girl raced after him and caught him by the sleeve.

" Nicko, Nicko! " she said.

" Well," he muttered thickly. " What more is there to say? "

" Won't you—won't you give Lord Farncombe some explanation——? "

" Explanation——? "

" Of the sort of terms we've been on, you

and I. He—he must be rather puzzled. Isn't it due to you as well as to me? "

He faced her with a curiously subdued air.

"Just as you please," he said, laughing dully. "Oh yes, perhaps it *is* due to me that he should learn a little more about me than he has been able to gather from personal observation—and from your eloquent but summary description. . . . Idler—waster—loafer——!" He repeated the words almost under his breath, screwing up his cap the while like a lubberly boy who has been detected in some fault. He seemed to be almost unaware of a sobbing exclamation from Lily, but walked slowly nearer to Farncombe, on whom he fixed a heavy, yet curiously impersonal stare.

"It's a true bill," he said, "and yet, a very few years back—*she* won't dispute it—I was one of the smartest chaps going, good at my job, with prospects as rosy as any man's in my regiment. There wasn't a cloud the size of your hand, apparently, in my particular bit of sky at the time I speak of; not a speck! Then I met this young lady—and—— Well, since we're in for it——!"

He indicated vaguely that they should sit down. He himself was tired; worn out with sheer physical strain.

Farncombe murmured something which signified his unwillingness to hear a disclosure

which might be painful to the narrator, but Jeyes, with some return of his wonted masterfulness, waved aside the interruption.

"No, no!" he exclaimed determinedly, "she wishes you to understand the exact nature of the friendship between her and me. I'm obeying her instructions, so you've got to listen."

The two men sat down, facing each other. Lily kept away from them, almost timidly it would seem. For the moment, the ex-Captain of infantry dominated the situation.

"I was under thirty, and still a subaltern," he said, "when I made Miss Parradell's acquaintance. Like most of my pals, I was spending my nights, whenever I could get away from Aldershot, in the stalls at the Pandora—much the same as you've been doing lately, and as a certain class of young men will go on doing as long as the Pandora, and similar shops, continue to flourish. Ha! How honored we felt, we men, in those days, at knowing some of the Pandora girls, and having the privilege of supping 'em and standing 'em dinner on Sunday evenings! If they'd been royal Princesses we couldn't have been more elated. Don't jump at conclusions. It generally ended there, or with our running into debt at a jeweler's. *We* were young, and *they* were beautiful—or we thought 'em so; but the majority of us weren't vicious, any more than the majority of the

girls were—though many of 'em were mighty calculating. It would have been better for us men if all the girls *had* been wicked; the glamour, the infatuation, the folly would have been sooner over, and one of us at least would have had a different tale to tell."

He broke off abruptly to gaze again at the floor, and Farncombe moved somewhat impatiently. Lily crept forward quietly. She was anxious not to say anything calculated to wound Jeyes again, but his reminiscences were traveling beyond her intent.

"I only wanted you——" she began, but the sound of her voice roused him instantly, though he merely tossed a question over his shoulder.

"Who was it introduced us?"

"Miss Du Cane—Aggie Du Cane."

"Agnes Du Cane. She's gone under. Outside Buckley's oyster-bar, wasn't it?"

"Not outside; in the parlor."

This rather absurd introduction of trivial detail seemed to serve a good purpose in making some of them feel that the recent storm, lurid as it had been, had passed. Evidently Lily Parradell thought so, but she was never more mistaken in her life. Jeyes neither met her eyes, nor even gave much heed to her presence. It was Farncombe he was addressing—Farncombe who had to hear the truth.

"Lily had only lately come to the Pandora," he went on—"a pale-faced slip of a thing—about eighteen. I confess I wasn't overwhelmingly attracted at first; she was so unlike the rest," and he laughed bitterly. The girl joined in that ill-timed mirth, but she, too, was peering back into the mists.

"Yes, wasn't I dowdy!" she cried. He resumed, as though she had not spoken:

"But she was humble, and naïve, and confiding, and my vanity was tickled by her delight at the little treats I gave her, and her gratitude for a tuppenny-ha'penny present or two. Nobody, I believe, with any pretensions to being a gentleman, had paid her much attention before I arrived on the scene."

"No; nobody," murmured Lily.

"I didn't find out that I was in love with her. You guess it's a love-story, don't you?"

Farncombe again moved uneasily. This quiet, orderly recital was even more trying to his nerves than the preceding volcanic outburst.

"My dear Captain Jeyes——" he began, but the other stopped him with an uplifted hand.

"I didn't find out that I was over neck and heels in love with her till nearly a year afterwards, when my regiment went to the Curragh. *That* did it—separation! What I suffered in

that hole, thinking of her, starving for her! In less than three months I was in London again on leave, and in my old stall at the Pandora. But even then, Farncombe, I hadn't your pluck."

"Pluck!" exclaimed the other, startled out of himself by this singular admission.

"Yes," said Jeyes, speaking now with a fierce animation—"the pluck to snap my fingers at the world, and propose marriage to a Pandora girl. Besides, my mother was living then, and—would you like to know what she used to call these Pandora women?" He bent forward, his hands tightly clenched, and spat out the words ferociously. "She used to call them a *menace to society*. She wrote that to me one day. With their beauty, and their flagrant opportunities for displaying it, they are a living curse, she used to say—a source of constant dread to mothers whose hope it is to see their sons safely mated to modest, maidenly girls of the typical English pattern. She told us once—my brothers and me, frightened as to where *we* were drifting—that she was one of many mothers who prayed on their knees daily that their boys might be spared from being drawn into the net woven by their own weaknesses and passions—drawn into it by these—these——!" He rose, choked on the word, and glared about him wildly for a moment. "Oh,

but I oughtn't to have repeated this to you. . . . I'm sorry. It's damned bad taste!"

For an instant he leaned unsteadily on the table; then he turned to Farncombe again with a confused air:

"Where was I? Back from the Curragh! Yes—yes—and so things went on for a couple of years—I trailing after Lily closer than ever—and at last—at last I *did* ask her to be my wife."

The girl, who was listening with parted lips and wide-open eyes, cried appealingly:

"Don't, Nicko; please don't!"

But he still appeared to be almost oblivious of her presence.

"I'd left it too late. The novelty of me had worn off; she had scores of friends by that time. She had made her big hit, and followed it by another, and was the talk of the town. And she had money, too! She wasn't dependent on *me* any longer for her gloves, and her trips, and her outings."

Lily's head was drooping now, and she was wringing her hands in anguish.

"Oh," she sobbed, "that's beastly of you—beastly!"

"She was kind to me, in a way——" he said—"kind and cruel. She didn't want to marry me; she didn't want to marry anybody; she was in love with herself and her success,

and what it was bringing her. But she wouldn't give me the kick. No, she wouldn't do that; I *had* been something to her. And there's where the kindness came in, and the merciless cruelty of it, too. Good God! if she had only broken with me then, firmly and finally—if only she had sent me away then—she—she might have saved me!"

"Oh, Nicko, Nicko!" came the tearful cry.

"Twelve months ago she did throw me a bone." This with an energetic fierceness that was devouring in its self-scorn. "The regiment was under orders for India, and, of course, I sent in my papers; and out of pity, I suppose—and because I was always pestering her—she promised to become engaged to me if I'd get other work to do. . . . Work! I wonder really whether she was grinning to herself when she made that stipulation."

Lily was now sobbing quietly, all the fire gone out of her, but the unhappy Farncombe could not utter a word.

"Work!" repeated Jeyes. "All the spunk, all the energy had been sapped out of me long before, and even her promise couldn't revive it. My search for a berth wasn't much more than a sham. At the back of my head I knew very well what I had come to. The only work *I* was capable of was dancing attendance on her, and filling in what remained of the day

and night at a rotten restaurant, a Bohemian club, and the bar of the theater. And that's been my sole employment for the past year—nothing but that. Pretty, for a man who started life as swimmingly as I did. Pretty—pretty——!"

His voice died away, and his eyes had the inward look of a man who was surveying the ruins of his life. For a little while there was a profound silence in the room. Lily had ceased the audible, half-hysterical breathing of a woman striving to stifle her tears. Indeed, when she spoke, her voice was strangely calm, though her utterance was somewhat labored.

"I—I don't think you've ever—put the case to me—quite so plainly as this, Nicko," she said.

"I don't think I've ever put it quite so plainly—to myself," he answered.

Her lips trembled piteously, but she persevered, with a brave effort that was wholly lost on the man for whose sake she was making it:

"You—you won't believe me . . . I—I've never fully realized it till now—the harm I've done you. I declare to God I've never realized it till now!"

Jeyes seemed hardly to heed her. He sighed again, and turned to Farncombe.

"I'm afraid I've been a shocking brute," he said resignedly. "I can only plead that I got

carried away. You must forget the things I've said of this girl. Forget 'em, will you? And look here! A man who isn't a sportsman deserves to be shot. You've won her; I've lost her. I congratulate you, old chap—I do—on my soul! . . . Take care of her, that's all. M-mind you take care of her!" His voice broke slightly on those last few words, and he jammed his cap on savagely as he made for the door once more. But Lily Parradell again caught his arm and drew him to her.

"No, no! Nicko! Nicko!" she cried, clinging to him convulsively, after darting at Farncombe one half-frightened, half-imploring glance. "Nicko, I can't undo the mischief I've done; I can't do that. But I can try to make it up to you—some of it—and I will, if you'll let me." She flung her arms round his shoulders when he would have shrunk from her embrace, yet there was no responsive tenderness in his manner, but rather angry surprise.

"Make it up to me! What do you mean?" he said gruffly.

"Ah, you must know what I mean," she said, with a despairing earnestness, and thrusting her face close to his. "Don't you understand! I'll marry you as soon as possible—next month, if you like—next week—quietly!"

The astounding words roused him from his stupor. He gripped her arms and stared at

her blankly, but she only continued, with a feverish gayety of manner that was more distressing than either her wrath or her humility:

"Yes, you've been in too great a hurry to settle matters, *you* have. Lord Farncombe and I—we—*we're* not going to be married! I've refused him! . . . I—I've ruined you, Nicko, but I—I've told him—I'm not going to draw *him* into my net!"

Clinging to Jeyes, and burying her face against his breast, she cried again bitterly: "Oh no, I'm not going to draw him into my net!"

Both men were utterly astounded, the one because of the splendid renunciation she was making, the other because he heard in her frantic words the knell of his dearest hopes. But, in her utter self-abandonment, she had no eyes for the bewilderment of the one or the dejection of the other. Raising her head, and speaking with wonderful self-control, she said:

"Nicko, I want to have one more word with Lord Farncombe—just one more word. . . . Only a minute, and then you must walk away together, you and he, and part good friends."

Jeyes, seemingly stunned by her willing sacrifice—for even in that bitter hour he could regard it in no other light—went out, and closed the door behind him. Farncombe, who looked sick and dazed, was preparing to follow, when

Lily, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, went to him and said forlornly:

"W-w-well—you *have* had a lucky escape, haven't you?"

"Escape?" he murmured, incapable of understanding her.

"Yes; you've heard what a cold-blooded, selfish wretch I am—how I've treated Nicko!"

He waved that aside as though the idea were fantastic and repulsive, but she was not to be deterred, and came close to him, gazing up into his face frankly and pathetically.

"And you've seen what I'm like when I'm in a rage," she continued; "you've seen what the genuine Lily Margaret Upjohn is without her disguise. Yes, that was *me,* Eddie, under the crust. Common as dirt, my dear; common as dirt!" and she clutched at the lapels of his coat. "Oh, you'll always remember me, with my eyes starting out of my head, spitting at Nicko! You'll always picture that horrible sight when you think of me."

"You—you were provoked; I—I admired you for it," he said, striving vainly to find words that would heal while hiding his own agony; but he could not deceive her.

"Ah, you dear boy!" she said tenderly. "Eddie, had you—a little hope—that, after all, I might turn your offer over in my mind and —eventually——?"

" Yes—ah, yes," he said heavily.

" Then I'll tell you something," she whispered, and a new light flamed in her eyes: " I *might* have, if—if you had persisted! "

He quivered as though she had struck him, and she remembered how he, too, must be suffering, and withdrew a step or two.

" Thank God Nicko came along! " she said, forcing her wan lips to utter the words. " What was it his mother called us girls? ' A menace to society! ' Creatures to be dreaded and prayed against! You see, I was right in wishing to protect you for your mother's sake as well as your own. But, again, thank God that Nicko came along! "

The unhappy young man found the situation beyond him. He collapsed on to a settee, and covered his face with his hands, but she only bent over him with soothing, eager solicitude.

" Ah, don't do that, Eddie! I am not worth it, Eddie! You must listen. This is what I want to say to you: Don't come near me any more; you really mustn't. And don't come to the theater again. If I thought you were sitting in front, I—I'm sure I couldn't——! " Her voice rose with a quick intensity of passion. " Swear—swear you'll keep away from me, and from the theater. . . . And you'll never go to any supper or dinner or dance

where you are likely to meet the other girls, will you, Eddie? Swear it!"

He rose and met her eyes for a moment; though he made no answer, she read in his face the acceptance of her demand. At that she took him by the shoulders again, and her eyes blazed into his.

"Eddie, if one of the other girls ever got hold of you, I—I'd kill her!" and she literally hissed the words at him. Then, darting away suddenly, she opened the door, and Jeyes came in.

"Now march, both of you!" she continued. "I—I'm pretty well baked!" She caught hold of a hand of each man and joined them together with a mirthless laugh. "Ha, ha, ha! I've made the pair of you precious miserable, if you only knew it," she said. "The difference is," she went on, turning to Jeyes, "that he'll soon forget me, but *you,* with me for a wife, are doomed for life!"

Putting her hands on her prospective husband's shoulders, she kissed him lightly, and then asked him a question with her eyes. He turned aside, and she offered her lips to Farncombe.

"Good-by," she said, almost quietly. "Away with you!"

They went out without another word, and she followed to the top of the stairs to watch

them descend. Then she came slowly back into the room and listened, as though she had committed some deadly crime. There was the sound of a closing door, and she looked around the empty room with a kind of horror in her eyes.

CHAPTER XV

THE MORNING AFTER

"WELL, there!" sighed Mrs. Upjohn, absent-mindedly pouring out another cup of tea, "I've 'ad a few hups an' downs in *my* life, but this time I'm knocked all of a 'eap. I feel as if I'd slipped on a piece of soap on the top landin' an' found meself lyin' on the 'all mat."

She shot a cautious glance at her daughter, who was lying, propped up by pillows, on a settee in the boudoir. The girl held a newspaper in her hands, but she had obviously taken it as a refuge from the alternative of speech, for her eyes were gazing sorrow-laden into vacancy. "Ma" was *en grande tenue,* having made a careful toilette in expectation of early visitors, but Lily had merely thrown a dainty dressing-gown over her nightdress, thrust her bare feet into bedroom slippers, and bundled up her wealth of hair into a simple knot. She was pale and heavy-eyed, yet more ethereally beautiful than when in her usual state of boisterous good health and high spirits. Her eyes seemed to be larger than ever, and

the dark crescents beneath them lent a violet tint to their sapphire blue. In a word, Lily was tired—for she had not slept, beyond a fitful doze which came to her aid long after the sun was high in the heavens—and desperately unhappy, now that she was back in the everyday world. Her share of the breakfast, a cup of tea and some toast, was practically untasted. She had snatched at the newspaper before her mother could even pretend to have recovered from the shock of a curt announcement that she had refused Lord Farncombe, and had promised to marry Nicko Jeyes at the earliest possible date.

And now that Mrs. Upjohn was regaining the power of speech, and had borne testimony to the same by imagining the disastrous physical result of an involuntary *vol plané* downstairs, the rebellious Lily had subsided into a stony silence. " Ma " felt that she had much to say, but literally dared not say it.

So she sighed deeply again, sipped her tea, nibbled at a triangle of toast, and picked up a newspaper, affecting an immediate and absorbing interest in the first article which caught her eye, which happened to be a lecture delivered before the Royal Society on " Neolithic Man."

Happily there was one member of the household who took life more cheerily that bright morning. Maud, occupied solely by the cares

of her department, bustled in from the adjoining dressing-room. Her hair was untidy as ever, and her arms were full of lingerie, but her good-humored face was all smiles.

"What frock 'll you put on?" she said to her mistress.

The girl started slightly. The question brought her to earth with a shock.

"One of your embroidered muslins, or your ninon?" went on the affable maid.

"Either. *I* don't care," said Lily, sinking back languidly among the cushions.

"Oh, gracious! What *is* the matter with you this morning? I've never known you as queer as this after any hop you've been to in my time." Then Maud, deeply concerned, turned to Mrs. Upjohn, who had been wondering vaguely what sort of a man a Neolithic one was: "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Maud!" said Lily, burying her head deeper in the cushions.

"Here I am, lovey," said the girl, hurrying across the room.

"Go into the dressing-room, and shut the door behind you, and don't let me see your stupid, fat face till I come to you."

Maud regarded these muffled instructions as being exceedingly humorous.

"That's better," she cried, laughing heartily. "Ha, ha, ha! That's how I like to hear her

talk. We needn't send for Dr. Gilson yet awhile. Ha, ha, ha!" and the sounds of her mirth came from beyond the closed door.

"Lil," said Mrs. Upjohn timidly.

"Yes, mother," was the faint reply.

"'Ave another cup o' tea, won't you?"

"No."

"'Nother bit o' toast, then?"

"No."

"Smoke a cigarette?"

"No."

"Come now, ducky," urged the perplexed matron, "you always do 'ave a whiff after your breakfast."

"No." This time quite determinedly. Mrs. Upjohn rose and walked aimlessly about the room.

"Oh dear! oh dear! Deuce take Carlton Smythe an' 'is supper-party—those are *my* sentiments; *an'* Lal Roper, busybody that 'e is! Things were going on with us as smooth an' peaceful as could be, before this upset." Ma's outspoken soliloquy was effective. Lily raised herself angrily on her elbow.

"You were in it, mother," she protested; "you are as much to blame as anybody."

Mrs. Upjohn started as though her daughter had thrown something at her.

"*'Ow* in it?" she said plaintively.

"In Uncle Lal's artful plan to prevent Nicko

LILY THE MORNING AFTER DECLINING LORD FARNCOMBE'S OFFER OF MARRIAGE

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from being invited. You've confessed you were."

As was her way, Mrs. Upjohn turned aside this arrow of fact.

"Lal twisted me round 'is little finger. I was clay in the porter's 'and, as your dad was fond of sayin'."

Once aroused, the girl found she could not nestle down again into the cushions comfortably.

"If only Nicko had been there," she murmured, speaking to herself rather than addressing her disturbed parent, "I shouldn't have given young Farncombe all those dances, nor wandered about with him in the intervals, nor allowed him to see me home. It all simply wouldn't, *couldn't* have happened. . . . Oh, mother——" and she hit a cushion energetically.

"Wot?" said Mrs. Upjohn weakly.

The girl sat up, embraced her knees, and knitted her brows.

"I'm—I'm so surprised at myself," she cried.

"Surprised?" echoed ma.

"Yes, and so disappointed with myself."

"Why, you 'aven't done anything that's not quite respectable, Lil. On the cont'ry——"

"No," said the girl, gazing dreamily at nothing, "I haven't done anything that's actually

not nice, but fancy letting myself go with young Farncombe as I did! I knew he'd been admiring me from a distance for weeks and weeks, but I had scarcely noticed him till last night."

Now that she was in a more docile mood, Mrs. Upjohn had crept closer, and seated herself on the settee, whereupon Lily leaned her head upon her mother's breast in a childish way that was more pathetic than the elder woman imagined, and said softly:

" I always thought I was such a cold girl, mother, in—in that way."

" I s'pose it was wot's called love at first sight, ducky," said Mrs. Upjohn, taking advantage, as she thought, of a suitable opening. She was considerably surprised and somewhat taken aback when her daughter laughed harshly and appealed to her " not to talk rot." But it was hopeless to expect a woman of her temperament to appreciate the real nature of the problem that was torturing Lily Parradell.

" Any'ow, it's not too late, Lil—even now——" she began soothingly.

" Not too late," cried the girl, frowning in the effort to understand.

" To back out, dearie," came the explanation. " The Captin couldn't possibly 'old you to a 'asty promise given him between four an' five in the mornin'."

" Oh, mother, how can you! " pleaded Lily.

"I've passed my word to Nicko, and I wouldn't break it for twenty thousand pounds. I'm going to pull Nicko *up*, mother. I've dragged him down, and I mean to raise him up. So help me God, I do!" and she raised clenched hands in the air to emphasize her despairing resolve.

"Well, you've got a tough job before you, Lil, in my opinion," was all that ma could find to say.

"Perhaps; but I mean to succeed, and, Nicko or no Nicko, I'm determined not to draw Eddie Farncombe into my net."

"Into your *net?*"—Mrs. Upjohn dwelt on each word as though the repetition stung her. "That's twice you've made use of that remark. Once now, and once when you nearly struck me dumb with your story of what 'appened this mornin'. 'Oo's accused you of pulling anybody into a net? 'Oo——?"

She was interrupted by a lively rat-tat on the door, and Jimmie Birch bounced into the room, looking as though supper and a dance following a strenuous night at the theater were a series of invigorating exercises prescribed by a specialist. Her face was flushed after a brisk walk. She wore a natty costume of black-and-white check, with a magpie hat and a red parasol.

"Hello, ma," she cried. "There you are,

Lillums!" Then she kissed Mrs. Upjohn, with a cheerful aside: "We've met before this morning, haven't we?" and, coming to Lily, pecked at her cheek, but eyed her rather keenly: "Well, dear old girl, and how are *you* to-day? A wreck?"

"Rather," said Lily.

"I ought to be, but I'm not," rattled on the visitor. "Directly I laid my pretty head on the pillow I went off, and never stirred till I found the breakfast-tray on my chest." Then she counted on her fingers. "Five to six—six to seven—seven to eight—eight to nine—nine to ten—ten to eleven; I've had six hours; that's not so dusty. *You* didn't sleep very soundly, I suppose," she added shyly.

"Not very," said her friend dismally, but Jimmie only smiled the broad grin of complete comprehension.

"Excited?" she demanded.

Lily shrugged her shoulders. There was an awkward silence, until Miss Birch, still beaming with anticipation, saw that Mrs. Upjohn had seated herself disconsolately at some distance.

"May I sit down for a minute?" she inquired, dropping her voice.

"Of course, Jimmie; do," said Lily. The girl flopped into an arm-chair, and evidently awaited some communication which was not

forthcoming. Ma began to drum upon the table with her fingers, and Lily busied herself with rearranging the cushions on the settee. After a while, Miss Birch discovered that she really could not endure this state of uncertainty.

"I hope I haven't dropped in too early?" she said with quiet sarcasm.

Lily settled her shoulders down into the cushions.

"Not a bit, dear," she murmured.

"It's nearly half-past twelve, and I—I *dashed* round." She waited, but the others said nothing, and, unable to restrain herself further, she cried eagerly: "Any news? Any—any—anything to tell me?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Upjohn abruptly.

"W-w-what——?"

"Lil's engaged."

"Ha, ha," cried Miss Birch triumphantly, clapping her hands and beating her feet upon the floor. "Ha, ha, ha, that's the best thing I've heard for a month of Sundays." She sprang up and caught Lily in her arms, and hugged and kissed her delightedly. "Oh, y'm! y'm! y'm! You humbugs!" Then she rushed at Mrs. Upjohn and embraced her in turn. "You solemn humbug, ma!"

In her elation, she danced off into the middle of the room, singing the refrain of that last waltz:

"If you would only, only love me;
If you would merely, merely say,
Wait but a little—little—for me. . . ."

Then her voice trailed off into silence, since she couldn't help noting the sorrowful expression of Lily's face and the gloom which had settled on Mrs. Upjohn. Ma was only biding her time; she pounced now with a certain venom of tone.

"You *'ad* better wait a little; you'd better wait till you 'ear *'oo* she's engaged *to*."

"Who—to?"

"*Whom* to, mother," said Lily, studying her nails.

"Why, isn't it Lord Farncombe?" demanded Jimmie.

"No, it ain't," snapped Mrs. Upjohn. "It's the Captin."

"The Captain? Nicko? Oh-h-h-h!" and Miss Birch drew a deep breath.

"Yes," said Lily calmly. "Nicko turned up here early this morning, while Eddie—while Lord Farncombe was with me, in fact—and I—we—the three of us—we talked matters over, and—and——"

Miss Birch's eyes were nearly starting out of her head.

"Was there a row?" she said in an awed voice.

"Oh, don't be so curious, Jimmie," grumbled Lily. "Poor Nicko has been after me for

six years. A girl must play the game, if she's at all decent and wishes to preserve a shred of self-respect."

Jimmie subsided into the arm-chair with a perfect decorum of manner that offered quaint contrast to her earlier elation, and Mrs. Upjohn, gaining confidence from her presence, moistened her lips with her tongue, and said venomously:

"'Ow do you feel about it?"

"How do I feel about it?" repeated the girl thoughtfully. She looked at Lily, and inquired in a still, small voice: "May I say?"

"Certainly," was the cold response.

"Well," she replied, with slow deliberation, "if I were on board ship at this moment, I should be ringing for the stewardess—that's how I feel about it."

Her friend wriggled round convulsively among the cushions and hid her face.

"Oh!" she wailed, "you're just like the rest of our girls on the question of marriage. You're detestable!"

Miss Birch sidled out of her arm-chair, flung herself on her knees by Lily's side, and threw her arms impetuously round the quivering shoulders.

"Oh, Lil—Lil—" she almost wept, but Lily Parradell had no mind for condolences. She repulsed the other almost harshly.

"Yes, you are!" she cried shrilly. "You'd rejoice to see me draw this boy into my net! You know you would. I dare say you jolly well wouldn't object to catching him yourself if you had half a chance. . . . But try it; just try it—you, or any of you!"

The scandalized Jimmie attempted to rise, but was held fast.

"Oh!" she protested.

"Lil, I'm perfec'ly ashamed of you, speakin' to Jimmie Birch in that manner," said Mrs. Upjohn, majestically indignant.

Lily's face was close to her friend's, and Jimmie felt a scorching tear fall on her cheek.

"She doesn't mean it, ma," she said brokenly.

"An' I 'ope not indeed. It ain't exac'ly pleasant to 'ave a dog in the manger for a daughter. Why *shouldn't* young Farncombe turn his attention to Miss Birch, pray, or to any young lady who doesn't object to takin' your leavin's!"

Ma was apparently addressing the circumambient air, but when Lily appealed to her to "hush," she strutted about and said emphatically: "No, I won't 'ush!"

The visitor fancied that she had thrust herself all unwittingly into what she called "a family row," so she struggled to her feet, and said quietly that she would come back in the

afternoon, but Mrs. Upjohn had been waiting for an opportunity to flaunt her grievances, and was not inclined now to let it escape.

"Lil seems to 'ave got some maggot or other in 'er brain about drawin' Lord Farncombe into 'er *net,*" she exclaimed. "Net, indeed! I would like to know what she means by that. As Lal Roper was sayin' yesterday, our tiptop, aristocratic fam'lies ought to be extremely grateful that strong, 'ealthy perfeshunals o' the class of Miss 'Arker an' Miss Trevail an' Miss Shafto are enterin' their ranks. An' if Lil chooses to be pig-headed enough——"

But Miss Birch had guessed shrewdly something of what Lily was suffering, and she cut short Mrs. Upjohn's tirade by making for the door.

"Do 'ave a bottle o' ginger beer before you go," pleaded the older woman, clinging to the chance of enlightening her daughter as to her real views on the vital question at issue; but there came a prolonged playful knocking at the door, which seemed to be a signal fully understood by those in the room, because there was a gloomy pause before Mrs. Upjohn added: "Here *is* Lal, now."

Lily groaned incoherently, and Mrs. Upjohn drew a long face, but the knocking was repeated, and Mrs. Upjohn was compelled to cry, "Come in."

It certainly was Roper, spick and span in his City attire, and evidently in a most jovial mood.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo!" he cried. "Any *more* bids for the handsome gilt candelabra with the crystal drops? He saluted Mrs. Upjohn and Miss Birch with affable nods, but bent solicitously over his special protégée. "Well, Lil! Well, my pet! How are you? Not up to much to-day, I fancy?" for his twinkling eyes had quickly noted her woebegone aspect.

"No great shakes," said ma gloomily.

"Dancing too hard, I expect."

"Oh, a deal too 'ard."

There was a slight pause; then Roper inquired:

"Anything else amiss, ma?"

Mrs. Upjohn deemed the effort too great to be made. She signaled emphatically to Jimmie Birch.

"You tell Lal," she cried. "I can't."

"Tell him what?" The stockbroker had suddenly dropped his animated air, and was apprehensive of some evil, the nature of which he could not even guess.

"Well, the old Pandora isn't going to score this time," said Miss Birch gravely.

"Isn't going to score? I don't follow you."

"Be plain, Jimmie," urged Mrs. Upjohn.

The girl giggled, and tried vainly to relieve the situation.

"Ha, ha," she cried. "Nature's taken precious good care of that, in my case."

Roper turned on her angrily, and strutted up and down the room.

"Now, look here, Jimmie," he declared. "A jest is a capital thing in its way. No man has a keener sense of humor than Lal Roper. But there are occasions when it's out of place, and this is one of 'em, my dear; and if it's not putting you to serious inconvenience——"

Finding that her quip had missed fire, Miss Birch also lost her temper.

"Oh, well, then, have it in the neck!" she said vehemently. "Lily has declined young Farncombe. And when you crack a joke next, Mr. Roper, I beg you'll contrive to favor us with a little variety, because you bore me stiff with your rotten wheezes, and always have done."

Roper was simply aghast at the tidings. He extended his hands appealingly to Mrs. Upjohn, who harped instantly on the phrase which she so resented.

"Won't draw 'im into 'er net, uncle," she snapped.

"Won't draw him into her——?"

"Her net," broke in Jimmie, derisively. "K-n-e-double t—net! You know the sort. Hullo, hullo, hullo! Fresh fish from the sea! Buy 'em on the beach; buy 'em on the beach!

All alive and wriggling!" and she mimicked the fussy little stockbroker's manner and voice so admirably that he turned his back on her in a state of ponderous indignation.

"Of course," he said, affecting to disregard the girl's jibing, "of course, there is this to be said, ma. It may be wise of dear Lil to decline Farncombe at first. It—it doesn't do for a girl, does it, to appear to throw herself at any man, let alone a young man of the position—the social status——"

Roper was picking his words with care, and mopping his domed forehead industriously, when Lil sat up suddenly, resolved to put an end once more and for all to an intolerable situation.

"Oh, for mercy's sake!" she protested, "cease discussing my affairs in my presence. . . . You, mother, why do you keep Uncle Lal in the dark? . . . Jimmie, why don't you speak plainly?"

"In the dark?" bleated Roper.

"Yes, Lal," said Mrs. Upjohn, with a great assumption of dignity, "you flyin' out at Jimmie over 'er 'armless joke stopped 'er finishin'. Lil 'as not only refused young Farncombe, but she 'as gone and plighted 'erself to another individual."

"Yes, to one of the best!" cried Lily passionately.

"Do I know him?" exclaimed the stupefied Roper.

Whereat Miss Birch had the bad taste to laugh scornfully.

"Know him!" repeated Lily, her eyes sparkling and her face flushing at the memory of what she had gone through during the early hours of that day. "You know him sufficiently to have plotted and schemed to prevent him being asked to the party last night."

"Did Lal do that?" broke in Miss Birch, with mock horror. "The impudence of him!"

Roper had suddenly become subdued. He sat down quietly, and shot out the one word:

"Jeyes!"

"Yes, Nicko," said Lily firmly.

Mrs. Upjohn, of course, could not permit herself to be left out at that crisis.

"But the Captin was at the party last night, notwithstandin'," she broke in.

"Nonsense, ma!" said Jimmie.

"It's quite true," said Lily, resignedly. "Nicko did manage to get into the theater somehow or other. He saw everything that took place there—saw me dancing far too often with Lord Farncombe, and finally stationed himself under the portico at twenty-seven in order to find out who brought me home."

The full shock of events was beginning to make itself felt on the visitors. Roper sat as

one stunned, but Jimmie Birch's mouth framed itself into a horrified " Oh——! "

" 'E's always been frightfully jealous, the Captin 'as," said Mrs. Upjohn.

Oddly enough, at this juncture a new element of discord was introduced. Miss Birch whirled round on the flabbergasted stockbroker.

" So really it's entirely owing to your interference that matters were brought to a head this morning," she said indignantly.

" Entirely," agreed Lily, whose eyes flashed complete accordance with her friend's outburst. Even Mrs. Upjohn joined in the attack.

" Yes, if Lal 'ad been content to mind 'is own business," she began.

" And hadn't meddled! " cried Jimmie.

" An' muddled! " added ma.

" Things might have gone on much the same as before," said her ally.

" An' might have ended different," cried Mrs. Upjohn, rejoicing in an object on which to vent her wrath. " Any'ow, I 'ope it'll be a lesson to him next time not to put 'is fingers into other people's pies."

" Oh, you are sanguine! " said Miss Birch, with withering intonation.

Lily essayed feebly to stay the gathering storm, but Roper himself rose to the occasion, and carried the war into the enemy's country.

" Ma—Mrs. Upjohn—Lily——" he began.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo!" broke in Jimmie scornfully.

"Ah, stop that now," he said, raising a hand. "Ma—Lily——" he resumed impressively. "For years—for more years than is agreeable to count—I've been a patron of the drama—particularly musical comedy, of which I've studied the development with especial interest."

Miss Birch, doubting his sincerity, propped her face saucily upon her hands, and rested her elbows upon a table.

"Yes, you've studied a lot of development in your day," she broke in; but he ignored her, and ostentatiously produced a pair of gloves.

"It's been a fad with me," he said slowly. "I put it no higher than that; but I've devoted time to it, and I frankly admit it—I've had more than one serious dispute with Mrs. Roper on the subject. Yesterday, by an odd coincidence —I received"—and his left hand tapped solemnly on the breast-pocket of his coat—"I received a letter from my wife. It was full of complaints. She says I haven't been to Bexhill, nor set eyes on her and the kids, for weeks and weeks. And to do Ellen Roper justice, she's not the woman to grumble without cause." He picked up the hat and cane which he had deposited on a chair, and began polishing the hat carefully with his sleeve. "Dash it all," he

said reflectively, "home ties *are* home ties! Taking one consideration with another—and after this occurrence—it's my intention for the future—my firm intention——"

But Roper's long speech and exceeding gravity had proved too much for the nerves of one of his listeners. Lily leaped up from her couch, ran to him, and clasped him round the neck.

"Oh, Uncle Lal, you are not going altogether," she almost sobbed. "We're tired and cross this morning, but you can't leave us altogether!"

"No, no, uncle, you reely mustn't—you reely mustn't!" chimed in ma.

"Forgive us, dear!" sobbed the girl. "Mother and Jimmie are a pair of cats——"

A horrified protest came from Jimmie; but the scene was suddenly brought to an end by the appearance of the starched Gladys, who entered with a card on a salver.

"Are you in?" she said, addressing her mistress loftily.

"In?" repeated Lily wrathfully. "What are you talking about?"

But the parlor-maid only surveyed her with mingled disdain and pity.

"Oh, you *do* look washed out!" she said.

Miss Parradell strode up to her angrily and snatched at the card.

"Never you mind whether I look washed out

or not," she said. "Who is it? And what do they want?"

She glanced at the card, and at once her pale face became, if possible, paler, while she put her hand to her eyes as though to shut out some sight that distressed her exceedingly. The superior Gladys gave no heed to these signs of emotion.

"They're in the dining-room," she said primly.

"Oh, go!" moaned Lily. "W-wait outside —on the landing."

"Oh, all right," said Gladys, tilting her nose. "But *this* won't get my silver cleaned, will it?"

She flounced out, and her mistress hardly waited for the door to close ere she walked to and fro distractedly.

"Oh, why can't they leave me alone?" she wailed. "What do they want with me now, both of them?"

Mrs. Upjohn ran to her anxiously.

"'Oo is it, Lil?" she cried.

"Nicko's downstairs—with Lord Farncombe. Nicko asks me to see him and the boy together. But I won't; I won't! Why should they torture me in this way?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SETTLEMENT

A room in which but a moment ago black despair seemed to have found a permanent abode was now all turmoil and excitement. Jimmie Birch's quick wits had pounced instantly on a plausible solution, if not an exact one, of this unexpected visit.

"You must see them, Lil!" she gasped. "Perhaps they've arrived at a friendly understanding, and have come here to propose that you should choose between them!"

"What? Great Scott——" began Roper; but Lily only stamped an emphatic foot and cried decisively:

"But I *have* chosen. It's settled. I can't go through it all again. I shall die!"

"Undoubtedly you ought to see them," said Roper, catching wildly at the hope that Jimmie Birch had guessed aright.

"It's a shame to persecute me so—a shame!" pleaded the girl tearfully.

"Give 'em a minute, dearie!"

"Hear what they have to say!"

"It *would* be uncivil *not* to!"

Thus ma, Roper, and Jimmie collectively. Before the tired girl could frame a protest they were at her again.

"'Ark to reason, dearie!"

"See 'em, my pet!"

"Buck up, Lil!"

She yielded helplessly, and strove to give instructions to Gladys and Maud, and there was such a flying about to bring stockings and shoes, and such a banging of cupboards and drawers to find a roll of bright blue ribbon to improvise a pair of garters, and such a to-do while Lily glanced at herself in a mirror, and pronounced her hair impossible, until a deft touch or two restored it to the artistic knot which had been sadly disarranged by her tumbling about among the cushions.

Then there were hurried asides between the confederates.

"She has to choose between 'em!"

"Bet my boots that's it!"

"What else can it be?"

"Oh, if it *is!*"

Miss Birch was so carried away by the exuberance of her emotions that she flung herself ecstatically into Roper's arms, but released herself with a haughty wriggle when she discovered who it was that returned her embrace with such fervor. He carried off a difficult situ-

ation by affecting a nonchalance he was far from feeling.

" I—er—think I'll run downstairs and shake hands with Jeyes and Farncombe while Lily is titivating herself," he said loftily.

" Don't you! " sneered Jimmie, who had to get square with him for that involuntary hug. " I should advise you not to risk it."

" Risk it! " he snorted.

" If Nicko knows you were the cause of his being shut out of the party last night, he'll simply throttle you! "

" What! Throttle me? Throttle Lal Roper! "

The little man made a formidable exit, but evidently put discretion before valor, since Nicko Jeyes did not see him again that day nor for many a day thereafter.

Meanwhile Mrs. Upjohn was striving earnestly to jam a " left " shoe on to Lily's right foot, and only desisted when the girl gave an agonized squeal.

" All right, dearie! Mother's 'ere. Now, calm yourself. Remember I'm 'ere all the time," babbled ma.

" Ring for Gladys," said Lily, when she had completed a hasty toilette, and Mrs. Upjohn hurried to the fireplace and pressed the bell-push continuously. In her eagerness to help she was blithely unaware that the bell was ring-

ing furiously. Still keeping her thumb on the knob of ivory, she said plaintively: "And *now* I don't believe I've rung!" until her daughter, strung to the uttermost tension, told her to stop, since she was not summoning the fire-brigade.

Miss Birch, glancing round with the sweeping eye of a strategist, saw that the great moment had arrived.

"I'll wait in your room till the men have been shown up," she announced, "and sneak out that way. Now, mind, Lily, if Nicko is willing after all that you should make your choice——"

"Yes, dearie," put in Mrs. Upjohn, "if 'e *is* willin'——"

"I tell you I *have* made it," cried the girl frantically. "I keep on telling you I've chosen! If you torment any more, either of you——!"

They fled, and she was given a few seconds of peace wherein to collect her bemused faculties before the impeccable Gladys opened the door and ushered in the two men. Jeyes looked pale, but carried himself stiffly, and, like Farncombe, was attired ceremoniously; their quietly business-like air was not without its effect on Lily.

Jeyes took the lead and shook hands with her.

"How are you to-day, Lil? Very fagged?" he said gently.

"I *am* a little," she replied almost inaudibly.

Farncombe advanced with marked hesitancy and bowed, but, without looking at him, she extended a limp hand and murmured a "How d'ye do?" Turning away, she invited Jeyes to sit down, and, noting that the younger man remained standing, she bade him, too, be seated, but resolutely avoided his eyes, which were, she knew, frankly fixed on her.

Jeyes seemed to be the only cool and really self-possessed person present.

"In the first place, Lil," he said, speaking with a slow distinctness which savored of a speech carefully prepared in advance, "Farncombe wants you to understand clearly how it is he is committing this breach of his compact with you. He promised—— What was it exactly?"

"I promised never to attempt to come near Miss Parradell again, nor even to enter the theater," said the other promptly.

"And if I'm any judge of a man, Lily, he would have kept his promise," said Jeyes. "Oh, yes, he'd have kept it faithfully but for *me*. I've brought him here to-day; insisted on it. I've *brought* him—do you see?"

He seemed to press for recognition of the fact, and the girl lifted her eyes for an instant.

"W-w-why?" she stammered.

"I'll tell you, my dear. When we left you

early this morning, you ordered us to walk away together and to part good friends."

"Yes, I remember p-perfectly."

"Well, we did walk away together, and we did part good friends, but the parting did not take place until some hours later in his rooms. We didn't part till I'd made him stand by me and listen to me while I had a long jaw with my brother on the 'phone."

"With your brother?" broke in Lily wonderingly.

"Yes, about the Rhodesian business."

"That Rhodesian business?" she repeated, though with a quick catch of her breath, which showed that she had a glimmering prescience of what was to come.

"I mentioned it to you yesterday," he said off-handedly. "Bob owns a third, with Peter Chalmers and Jim Dalby, of a group of farms near Buluwayo, and he's been badgering me eternally to cut this rotten life in London and settle out there as their agent."

He leaned forward slightly, spread his hands, and added, with the simplest air imaginable: "And I've accepted, old girl."

"Accepted?" she said; and her voice broke on the word.

He affected to treat the affair with humor.

"Leaving you to bring an action against me to recover damages for a broken heart." Then

he smiled grimly, and drew a deep breath. "Yes, I'm chucking you, Lil. I give you formal notice of my intentions, and you can drive down to your solicitors this afternoon and instruct them to issue a writ without delay. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nicko——!" murmured the girl faintly.

"Unless," he went on emphatically, "unless you've an idea of consoling yourself shortly with—with another chap, and prefer not to carry the matter into Court."

She made as though she would rise, but he restrained her by a gesture.

"H'sh! No, not a word!" he cried, almost sternly. "Ah, Lil—Lil—I know you're full of generous, honest impulses, though I *did* tear you to rags in Farncombe's hearing a few hours ago. But I'm not going to allow you to sacrifice yourself to them; I—I've come to my senses, and I'm not going to permit it."

He bent forward eagerly, pleadingly. "Oh, my dear, why should I make you pay for the weaknesses of my character? Because that's what it would amount to. I've bullied you for having played skittles with my life, my career. So you *have!* Damn it, so you have! But you have done it out of blind thoughtlessness; and if I'd been a fairly strong man, with some ballast in me, you couldn't have landed me where I am—not you, nor fifty Pandora girls!"

Then he sat erect, with that air of soldierly abruptness which she knew so well. "And that—that's the moral of the tale," he sighed.

Swinging round abruptly on Farncombe, he took the bewildered Viscount unawares.

"There's nothing more, is there, Farncombe?" he inquired, as though he had conducted some quite ordinary matter to its legitimate close.

The younger man was leaning forward, his hands clasped in front of his knees, and his head bowed. When the words came, they were broken and humble.

"Except that—that I'd like to repeat—what I've already said to—to you, Jeyes," he faltered. "I—I. . . . Oh, you make me feel terribly small!"

Lily sprang upright, and went to Jeyes. She did not know what she meant to say or do, but his mind was fully made up, and he took her in his arms as though he were an elder brother consoling a fretful and disconsolate sister.

"Ah, Nicko—I can't—I can't—" she sobbed chokingly.

He patted her shoulder with a reassuring hand, but said nothing. He wanted her to speak now—to get the wrench over and done with.

" If you do this thing, Nicko," she said, " what—what would become of my resolutions? "

" Your resolutions? " he said amusedly.

" To—to raise you up, Nicko."

" You *are* raising me up, little girl—setting me square on my feet again."

" And—and drawing Eddie into my net! " she murmured in a frightened way.

He patted her shoulder again with a big-brotherly air.

" Oh, we've talked of that too, he and I," he replied promptly. " Farncombe gave me an account of what passed between you here. My dear Lil, your conscience may be quite clear. Nobody can ever reproach *you* with trying to draw him into your net."

" Oh, they *would*—they *would!* " she sobbed.

He held her at arm's length, and shook her fondly.

" At all events," he said, with a sort of sad pride in his face, " the task you have to face now is to prove to the world—*his* world—that Miss Parradell is equal to playing ' lead ' on a bigger stage than the stage of the Pandora. . . . And you'll *do* it! Oh yes, *you'll* do it! " His voice died away miserably, and he released her. Then, bracing himself firmly for the last word, he looked at his watch. " Well," he said with a fine pretense of cheerfulness, " I've got

to lunch with Bob at half-past one at the Junior Carlton——"

"Ah, it's not nearly that, Nicko. You mustn't go yet! I——"

She hurried past him, moving towards the door as if to bar his passage. A strip of bright blue ribbon fluttered to the carpet from beneath her dressing-gown. For an instant she did not see it, and his eyes were the first to fall on it. He stooped and picked it up, folded it carefully, and put it in his pocket. In her sudden agitation she stooped and hitched up her loosened stocking through her robe, and affected to laugh at the incident.

Jeyes, too, laughed, and they faced each other a few seconds, each unable to speak, each dumbly conscious that the tiny scrap of silk was all that was left to the man of his long-drawn-out dream.

But Lily could not maintain the pretense. She broke down utterly, burst into tears, and wailed:

"Oh, Nicko, Nicko! Is this the end?"

In that trying moment he was stronger than she. Tapping her shoulder lightly again, he said pleasantly:

"Not by any manner of means, my dear. It isn't good-by. Far from it. We'll kill the fatted calf several times before I start—you and I and the boy. Besides, by-and-by, you and

he must take a trip and come out to see me. Seringa Vale is the farm where I shall be quartered, so Bob tells me." His glance wandered dreamily through the windows across the familiar outlines of the square. "Jermyn Street to Seringa Vale, my dear! Pooh! there are no great distances in these days." He did not look at Lily again, but turned round on Farncombe. "You dine with me to-night, recollect; it's an engagement. Eight o'clock at Catani's. And afterwards you fetch her from the theater and take her home. That's *your* job now."

Heedless of the girl's bitter grief, he strode out manfully and closed the door. She sank into a chair, woebegone and distressed, and Farncombe approached slowly and stood before her.

"Lily," he said thoughtfully, "I'm afraid there's one thing finer than winning the woman you love, and, when you've won her, being prepared to go through fire and water for her."

"And what's that?" she murmured.

"Having the courage to give her up, as Jeyes has done." His words brought on a renewed outburst.

"Oh, Nicko, Nicko!" she breathed.

The man who might now fairly regard himself as her accepted husband was almost as deeply stirred as she. He sat beside her, and took her hand consolingly.

"By George, he's a brick, isn't he?" he said.

For a little while she did not answer, until, conquering her agitation, she was able to raise her eyes to his.

"Eddie," she said, "if ever we marry—well, then, when we marry"—for she had seen his sudden distress at the implied doubt—"you'll never taunt me about my origin, will you? You'll never say——"

Lord Farncombe might not have had extensive experience in love-making, but he certainly knew enough of its ways and means to stop that outburst. Nevertheless, when she regained her breath, her words showed that a vague fear was still troubling her.

"And then there's poor mother," she said. "You won't be very proud of her, will you?"

"Your mother," he cried boyishly, preparing to make light of all difficulties. "Oh, she's—she's an awfully good sort."

"But she hasn't an 'h' to her name," she reminded him.

"Well," he said inadvertently, "she oughtn't to have."

Lily bounced up quickly and walked away.

"Do you mean she calls herself Hupjohn?" she cried.

"No, no, no!" he protested, horrified by the notion that he might have hurt her feelings.

"At any rate, 'h's' don't lead you to heaven, do they?"

Even in her present flustered state Lily felt that this topic had better be avoided. Moreover, there was a sharp incongruity about any tender passages between them at that trying moment which appealed to her sense of the ludicrous.

"Well, you'd better go now," she said, cutting the Gordian knot suddenly.

"And to-night?" he questioned, with a timid smile.

"No; I'll come home alone."

"Lily——" he urged.

"Please—— Not for two or three days. You must give me time to shake down over this."

"On Saturday?"

"No," she cried fretfully.

Being a persistent young man, he waived the point by raising another.

"If it is fine on Sunday we might run out somewhere in the car for luncheon."

Lily smiled sorrowfully at him.

"I'll—I'll write," she said, and he left it at that. He took her hand, but she kept him at a distance. He attempted to come nearer, yet again she checked him, for his intent was clear, and she shook her head quietly.

"Not just yet, Eddie," she said. Where-

upon he smiled at her again, and bowed himself out.

She went to the door and watched him descend the stairs, wafting him an affectionate adieu as he turned on the landing. Then she wandered back listlessly into the room. Her face was very thoughtful, and during nearly a minute she seemed to be peering anxiously, almost fearfully, into the future. At last she went to the door of her bedroom, opened it a little way, and called: "Mother! Mother!"

Mrs. Upjohn bustled in, all aglow with excitement.

"Yes, Lil!" she cried. "Yes, dearie; yes! 'Ave they given you your choice?"

"No," said the girl, "they've given me no choice."

"Wot——?" and up went the maternal hands in dismay.

"Nicko's going out to South Africa, mother."

"South Africa!"

"Well, to Rhodesia."

It was all one to Mrs. Upjohn, who fastened on the dominating fact that either locality was a long way removed from Bloomsbury.

"Then you're free, Lil!" she cried exultantly.

"No, I'm not. Nicko's handed me over."

"'Anded you over!" Ma was in a state of

excitement which did not permit her brain to work efficiently; she could only gasp out repetitions of her daughter's words.

"Yes—to Lord Farncombe."

Then, indeed, Mrs. Upjohn nearly gave up the ghost. She dropped gasping into a chair.

"An' you an' the young gentleman——!" That was all she managed to say, but Lily reassured her with a quiet:

"I suppose so."

"Oh, the dear Captin!" murmured ma, who never, by any chance, could display tact in a delicate situation like this. The girl promptly began to cry again, and dropped into her mother's lap, putting her arms around the astounded old lady's neck, and murmuring bitterly:

"Oh, poor Nicko! What will become of him?"

"'E'll 'ave 'is reward, Lil," Mrs. Upjohn soothed her. "'E'll 'ave 'is reward 'ereafter."

Had she but known it her daughter was on the very verge of hysteria. All manner of mad notions were whirling in her brain, and her thoughts suddenly reverted to the life she was leaving behind her.

"And poor Carlton Smythe!" she cried. "Oh, poor Carlton!"

"Why, wot's *'e* done?" demanded her mystified parent.

LILY AFTER HER ENGAGEMENT

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R L

"He's losing every one of his best girls, mother. Gwennie Harker—Maidie Trevail—Eva Shafto—and now me! Oh, poor Carlton!"

"'Ush, dearie; 'ush!" said ma, in a most matter-of-fact tone, and rocking her wayward daughter to and fro like a baby. "Don't consider *'im!* Think—just think—what a lot of good you're all doin' to the aristocracy!"

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On a day not so long ago, but fully three years after Jeyes had bade farewell to London, he rode across the high veldt at sunset towards the cleft in the Matoppo Hills in which Seringa Vale Farm was situated. Already he could see the corrugated roofs of the long, low range of buildings which constituted that thriving homestead. In the mellow light they looked almost picturesque, because they were neat and trim, and not wholly devoid of color, while an English lawn and flower garden were shaded by giant teak and mahogany trees, and flanked by clumps of fig-trees and mimosa.

In vast enclosures on either hand herds of cattle were grazing, two-year-old and three-year-old bullocks and heifers, brought together for the half-yearly sale from the still more extensive and well-stocked tracts where the best grass and water were available. Jeyes surveyed them with a professional eye. The beasts were of the right size, color, and weight: they

would run to good figures in the mart; in a word, Seringa Vale was prosperous, and the manager's commission on the net profits would amount to a considerable sum at the end of the year.

He himself looked younger and healthier. He was lean, and sinewy, and brown, and those who knew him would surely have refused to believe if any stranger happened to remark that Nicko Jeyes had once been described as a loafer and a waster. Yet, while his trustworthy pony was jogging along steadily to stable and food, the rider's reflections wandered from the present to the past. A letter had reached him that morning before he rode off to a distant kraal to investigate a dispute between Kaffirs, and its contents were well calculated to send his thoughts wandering back through the years and across half the world.

Lord and Lady Farncombe were in South Africa! They and their friends, Miss Eva Carmichael, a cousin of Farncombe's, Sir Rupert Spenser and Mr. George Ouless, had reached Cape Town, and were traveling up country, preparatory to a shooting trek from Buluwayo into North-East Bechuanaland.

He had read something, but heard a good deal more, of Lily Parradell's rapid conquest of her new set. Farncombe's family had at first been indignant, but the birth of a grandson put an

end to these alarums and excursions, and young Lady Farncombe was now welcomed in the most exclusive circles.

Ah, well! With her youth and beauty and genius, she was well equipped for conquest. As for himself, he would soon be a middle-aged old fogy, for a man is so constituted that he thinks that way at thirty-seven, yet regards himself as quite a boy when he is ten years older.

But—who were those people gathered on the spacious stoep, and how came there to be such a collection of Cape-carts in the home yard? Life on the veldt strengthens the sight, and Jeyes was still a good half-mile away when he saw a white handkerchief fluttering from a woman's hand, and the next instant his pony knew that the day's work must end hurriedly. Lily herself was the first to greet him as he flung his lean body from the saddle.

"Lady Farncombe!" he cried breathlessly, and thanking his stars that the fast gallop might seem to account for his agitated air.

"Oh!" she cried, her eyes sparkling with joy at the success of this long-planned surprise. "Is that the way you greet me, Nicko?"

"Well, then, Lily. . . . But why didn't you——?"

He held out a hand, which she disregarded promptly, and kissed him very heartily.

"You might at least tell me you are glad to see me!" she said, holding him at arm's length, and surveying him with critical approval.

"No need to tell you that."

He, too, had eyes for no one but her at the moment.

"You are thinner. You have been ill!" he said.

"Just a bit run down. That's one explanation why they sent me a long sea-voyage. But the real one is that Eddie and I meant to come as soon as the kiddie could be left safely. I wanted to bring him—he's such a darling, Nicko—only his granddad wouldn't hear of it, nor Lady Godalming either, for that matter."

And now Farncombe was gripping his hand, and introductions followed. There was so much news to give and receive, and questions to ask and to answer as to the well-being of "ma," who insisted on living quietly in a cozy flat on the Battersea side; of Lionel Hesketh Roper, who had "retired" to Bexhill; of Jimmie Birch, now leading lady at the Pandora; of Nicko's experiences in Rhodesia; and of the shooting-party's determined rush through Cape Colony and the Transvaal to the pure air of the high veldt, that Jeyes awoke almost with a start to the fact that he was presiding over a well-arranged and crowded dinner-table, and that Lily Parradell—the real, good-hearted, im-

pulsive Lily—was sitting on his right hand, and Farncombe on his left.

Once, when he caught a pleasant laugh from Eva Carmichael at some story Norris, his assistant-manager, was telling about the disingenuous Kaffir, he turned to Lily and said:

"Your cousin seems to be a jolly sort of girl."

"Yes, Nicko, isn't she sweet?"

"Well, I'll take your word——"

"Oh, but you'll like her more and more every day. You've got to, because you'll be in her company constantly during the next three months—to put it mildly."

Jeyes, though an excellent host, might certainly be forgiven the expression of bewilderment which flickered in his face, whereby Lily was much diverted.

"Did you think that this gang meant to quarter itself all that time at Seringa Vale?" she cried. "No, Nicko. You're coming with us. Eddie arranged everything with your partners, and you haven't a word to say. They are sure you need a change, and that a long trek into the interior will do you good, and that the business can go along quite smoothly here in your absence. So that is settled, and all you have to do is to find the salted beef—I mean the salted cattle—because Mr. Ouless has brought every-

thing else, either from London or Bulu-wayo. . . ."

Late that night when Jeyes, as was his habit, went out to give a final look round before retiring to rest, he met Norris crossing a strip of lawn towards his own small bungalow, and the youngster was actually whistling "Mind the Paint."

" I say, Jim, just stop it, will you? " cried Jeyes in an annoyed tone.

" Why, what's the matter, guv'nor? " asked his surprised *aide.*

" What the deuce do you want to whistle that air for? "

" Why shouldn't I? I heard a girl sing it at a *café chantant* at Salisbury last time I was there. It's a harmless sort of song. Do you mean that I might disturb the ladies? "

" Y-yes. Of course, you young idiot! "

" I'm sorry, but I really didn't think they could hear me at this distance."

" Oh, well, p'r'aps you're right. My mind was wandering. . . . Good-night! "

" Good-night, sir."

The boy didn't know! Beyond any manner of doubt, he didn't know! The song had outlived the singer! " Mind the Paint " was still in vogue, but the " Mind the Paint " Girl forgotten in the more striking personality of Lady Farncombe!